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ABSTRACT

This collection of working papers deals with the relationship among women, social class, and adult education. In her paper entitled "Women and University Extension," Pat Usher argues that by sustaining the dominant cultural, ideological, and social relationships of production in capitalist Britain, university adult education contributes to the sexual division of labor and opportunity that undermines the pursuit of genuine equality for women. Discussed in a paper entitled "A Second Chance for Women" by Jane Thompson are strategies for making the organizational structures and assumptions underlying adult education more responsive to the needs of women. The next paper, "Part-Time Learning" by Julia Kellaway, addresses the failure of higher and further education to make provisions for female students with domestic commitments to husbands or young children. In a paper entitled "Words in Edgeways," Julia Kellaway focuses on the teaching of English in adult education as it affects female students. The final paper of the collection, "Law and the Challenge to Patriarchy," examines ways in which the teaching of law in second chance courses differs from the way in which it is taught in law degree courses. (MN)

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WOMEN, CLASS AND ADULT EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

One of the traditional assumptions about reflection and analysis is that what is being examined has to be studied over a significant period of time so that the consistency of certain characteristics can be distinguished from those which are insignificant and superficial. The main problem of this approach, of course, is that in the process of identifying 'key variables' as distinct from 'marginal variables' a great deal of the significance of day-to-day developments can be dismissed as aberrations or more frequently go unrecognised. Thus in some ways it may seem too early to begin analysing the significance of a course which has only involved a small number of students (33) and tutors (5) for a limited amount of time (1 day a week for a year). And yet our experience during the year has raised all sorts of issues relevant to the contemporary interest being shown in women's education which it seems important to record before they get overlooked. And hopefully the working principles we have identified will provide debating points for others concerned to develop an alternative philosophy and practice from the ones which currently dominate adult education provision.

Although critical sociology has contributed a good deal in recent years to the debate about the selection and control of knowledge, and to the relationship between education and social and cultural reproduction, the arguments have most often been confined to the experience of schooling. Any serious re-examination of the assumptions and practice of adult education have been insignificant - although there are indications that this resistance is being challenged.(1) In almost all respects, however, the relative under-achievement of girls and women in education has been ignored, or has been subsumed within more general discussions about social class, curriculum development, organisation and management. It has been left principally to feminists in the educational world to direct attention to the specific problems involved in the education of women, though as yet their contributions have been more concerned to describe the inequalities rather than analyse and explain them in relation to, for example, materialism.(2) As in other areas the philosophy and practice of adult education has been least disturbed by these developments. The working papers in this collection are an attempt to force adult education to enter this important debate.

(1) See Adult Education for a Change, ed. Jane Thompson, Hutchinson 1980.

(2) An important exception to this generalisation is the collection of papers edited by Anne-Marie Wolpe and Annette Kuhn, Feminism and Materialism RKP, 1978.

WOMEN AND UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

At the beginning of the 1980s women in Britain appear to have won significant advances in their movement towards genuine equality with men. After fifty years with full voting rights, legislation has been enacted concerning Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination at the workplace, widespread access to contraception has been provided as part of the welfare state and there is a general feeling in discussion at all levels of society that women have now gained equality of opportunity and achievement. But there is also the undisputed assumption that if they have further aspirations, then they are likely to jeopardise the welfare of their families and in the process destroy not only social cohesion but also their innate feminine qualities. During the latest economic crisis in Britain, these arguments have received fresh endorsement and, almost daily, the media report calls by 'radical' Conservative ministers for women to remain in the home and improve the quality of mother care. Such philosophies translate into policies which seem determined to reduce the demand for social welfare provision carefully built up since the last war and to release work for men in times of recession and high unemployment.

In the general struggle for female equality, it has been a good deal easier to identify inequality and prejudice in the place of work than in education. The class divisions of society, which include a rigid division of labour between the sexes, are very overt, and remain entrenched at the workplace despite legislative attempts to modify them. However, it has been a relatively recent kind of analysis which has attempted to demonstrate the relationships between the organisational structure of schooling, the selection, organisation and distribution of knowledge and the class and sexual structure of a society like Britain. Such an analysis is usually described as being inappropriate in a debate about the roles and functions of adult education.

However, the contributors in these papers believe that it is impossible to separate adult education from the rest of formal provision, and that it should be analysed in similar terms to any other social institution. It cannot function in a social vacuum and its role must be viewed in the socio-economic context in which it is located. For those of us working in Britain that setting is a capitalist system and it is argued here that adult education must be involved in contributing to the overall aims of such a system.

As Ashcroft and Jackson remind us, the relationships between theory and research and working class adult education are 'lush pastures for ambivalence, uncertainty and contradiction'. (1) It is fully accepted here that theory is

needed to inform practice if adult education is to succeed in breaking through some of the taken-for-granted attitudes which have guided adult education to its position today. Many will see these papers as an ungenerous attack on the achievements and philosophies of liberal reformers. While the authors share the hopes and aspirations of liberal reformers, they nonetheless find the reformist strategy an inadequate and unsatisfactory analysis with which to face the future.

The liberal reformers of the past century have not been without success, judging by the variety of institutions now offering adult education, but current practitioners now have the benefit of those reformers' experience behind them and cannot escape the unassailable fact that adult education fails to live up to the most basic requirement of the liberal philosophy, that it should provide opportunities for all the people and not just certain socio-economic groups.

Harold Wiltshire acknowledged during the 1950s that the new policy in University adult education after the Second World War was addressed not to self-elected groups of citizens but to an 'educated elite' and that there was a 'concentration of effort upon the educated minority'. (2) The Russell Report gives further evidence of a narrowing of focus in terms of recruitment. 'Evidence from those in close contact with the provision of classes repeatedly referred to their observation, impression and belief that increases in fees were an effective deterrent to those most in need of educational provision'. (3)

Whilst there will be many adult educators who are satisfied with the achievements of liberal reform to date, the contributors to these papers share the view that adult education must now seriously be engaged in questioning, as Freire recommends, the political nature of adult education. 'That as educators we should recognise that when we work on the content of the education curriculum, when we discuss methods and processes, when we plan, when we draw up educational policies, we are engaged in political acts which imply an ideological choice'. (4)

The analysis which sees education as conveying and reproducing social divisions which correspond to the economic organisation of any capitalist society has become a familiar, if not widely accepted view, as applied to schooling. So far, the applicability of this analysis to adult education has only recently been suggested and by no means seriously debated.

The starting point of these papers is that, because of its marginality, adult education 'does not add to or subtract from an overall degree of inequality and repressive personal development', (5) and that adult education provides no effective alternative strategy to a social system which provides for the reproduction of the social divisions which exist in the rest of society. Bowles and Gintis express it thus: 'the experience of work and the nature of the class structure are the bases upon which the education values are formed, social justice

assessed, the realm of the possible delineated in people's consciousness and the social relation of the educational encounter historically delineated'.(6)

It would be easy to fall prey to the pessimism of economic determinism. Whilst not underestimating the importance of such theories, it will be argued here than an educational strategy can be adopted in adult education which involves taking stock of the role played by culture, knowledge, values and beliefs, that such an analysis can be the starting point for arriving at different kinds of curriculum which take account of different social class perspectives and includes an appeal to the cultural values of all classes and not just 'educational elites'. It will be the particular concern of this paper to show that such an approach must be applied if women are to break out of the stereotyped patterns of opportunity which currently exist in formal education.

Given that non-vocational adult education is mainly concerned to provide adults with opportunities for a constructive use of their leisure time, many would agree that the analysis which sees schooling reproducing the pattern of social relations prevalent in the labour market, is not applicable to adult education as offered in universities. A substantial body of evidence has now been collected which points to the under-achievement of girls and women in each sector of compulsory education. The analysis of the content of girls' education clearly demonstrates its contribution to socialising girls and women into accepting different and unequal roles from those of boys and men. However, university adult education is successful in attracting a majority of women as students and this can give rise to the belief that such arguments do not apply to the process of adult education.

This view is attractive but short-sighted. It is the argument of this paper that university adult education does play a vital part in sustaining the dominant culture, ideology and social relationships of production in capitalist Britain and in so doing contributes to the sexual division of labour and opportunity which undermine the pursuit of genuine equality for women. What follows is an attempt to illustrate the different points of the argument.

When Harold Wiltshire wrote his piece on the characteristics of the old and new tradition in University adult education in 1956,(7) he brought rare insight in describing the curriculum and the attitudes of those designing and participating in course programmes. He expressed the fear that so much was being concentrated on the interests of so few and asked that the purpose and conviction of the old tradition be harnessed with imaginative approaches to the course design associated with the post war tradition. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it can now be argued that Wiltshire's analysis did not take account of the cultural values implicit in the curriculum of university adult education and that it is the hidden and implicit values and assumptions which conspire to exclude 'the reflective citizens' who do not feel sufficiently confident or qualified to approach university education through the extra-mural route.

No adult educator can escape from Williams' analysis that all our programmes, while claiming to be influenced by student needs are 'seen to express, consciously and unconsciously the wider organisation of a culture and society, the content of education .... expresses .... certain basic elements in the culture'.(8) The content of university adult education represents a particular selection, a particular set of emphases and omissions. The process of designing the curriculum which university adult education offers is influenced by the social and political attitudes of those who teach and those who attend its programmes.

In their recent work on LEA curriculum, Mee and Wiltshire have demonstrated that, despite the claim that adult education is free from the constraints imposed by examination syllabuses in the compulsory sector of education, and can therefore be more reflective of student demand, an amazing consensus seems to exist throughout LEA non-vocational adult education about what kinds of programmes ought to be offered. Mee and Wiltshire hesitate to explain and indeed claim 'not to know what the processes are which determine and maintain this consensus or what the channels are through which they operate'.(9) Even a cursory glance at university adult education prospectuses feeds the suspicion that a similar core curriculum exists throughout adult education departments and reflects a clear consensus about what it is appropriate for university adult education to offer. It is important therefore to investigate the factors which influence the choice of programme and what political, economic and social pressures are at work in influencing tutor-organisers in university adult education.

It is argued here that the major influence on the content of university adult education is its relationship with internal departments of the university to which it is attached. Tutors are appointed as subject specialists and can only achieve personal and academic advancement by fulfilling university criteria in terms of research and publications. Within the wider world of adult education, the content of university programmes is regarded as being of more specialist and higher status in value than the skills or craft biased programmes offered in local authority provision. The status of university adult education relates directly to the omnipotence of the university in the hierarchy of authority in further and higher education and the effect which this has on all sectors of compulsory education. Universities offer access to higher status knowledge. The chief characteristics underlying what is assumed to be the most worthwhile knowledge are 'an emphasis on written as opposed to oral presentation, individualism or avoidance of group work or co-operativeness ... abstractness and the unrelatedness of academic curricula, which refers to the extent to which they are 'at odds' with daily life and common experience'.(10) Access to this knowledge and the cultural training implicit in the process confers on those

who attend university a higher status in the differentiated power structures of a class based society. This is partly an economic function in that it trains workers and managers for the most skilled levels of each profession but it is also an ideological function in that it creates and sustains a small and elite group of experts in each discipline who help to legitimise and justify a differentiated structure in a class based society. A major consequence of this is that the division of labour, which forms part of the social relations of production, serves to prevent women from being admitted to university education in equal numbers. Universities play a crucial role in socialising and reinforcing the privilege of dominant groups in society and in a society where women are largely absent from influential and authoritative positions, it follows that it will be exceedingly difficult for women to gain an equal right of entry to a university education.

The kind of role which adult education departments have in relation to their parent bodies is the source of a great deal of tension for tutor-organisers and administrators. For, while they can claim some status within the hierarchy in adult education, in terms of their relationships with colleagues in the internal departments they are often regarded with disrespect because they are teaching students who are not necessarily as qualified as students of internal departments and it is believed that specialist and complex knowledge cannot be made available to non-specialist and non-professional groups. As a consequence, many university adult education departments strive to 'become academically high powered skilled brokers providing access to the most fundamental resources of knowledge'.(11) Within the hierarchy of authority in higher education, adult education departments are relegated to a lower status position simply because they try to broaden access to high status knowledge which is assumed inside universities to be too specialist and abstract to be offered to a non-academic audience.

Within this contradiction, we can begin to understand why it is that women participate in university adult education so widely as students but find it so difficult to gain places in internal departments. Between 1968 1976 the percentage of women amongst UK applicants to university increased from 31 per cent to 36.2 per cent and the percentage of women who were successful in obtaining places rose from 29.7 per cent to 36.9 per cent. These improvements, nonetheless cannot disguise the heavily disproportionate balance between the sexes. A rare exception is in medicine where equal numbers of men and women are now admitted in some Faculties. Before the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, women applicants to medical schools were subject to an admissions quota, regardless of 'A' level grades. Despite this, women who do get into higher education display patterns of subject choice quite different from men. Patterns of

curricular differentiation between the sexes begun in schools are merely carried on in universities and polytechnics. Women in polytechnics and universities are most likely to be found on courses in Arts, Social Sciences, Education, Business Studies, Catering or Design. Sciences, Maths and Technology courses are heavily dominated by men. Women rarely take sandwich courses which combine academic studies with work experience. In 1974, 23,524 men took these compared with 3,621 women. In certain subjects, in languages and some social sciences, women comprise a major part of the student body. However, by the time they reach postgraduate study, women are conspicuous by their absence, even in those subjects where women take up a large proportion of the undergraduate population.

Within the universities there is a tacit acceptance of a hierarchy of status among Faculties which relates to the hierarchy of work attached to the different disciplines. The high status conferred in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century on the study of classics has certainly shifted to Science and Engineering, reflecting the changing needs of the economy. Calculus is more highly valued than reading Greek and Latin, even though both may be equally useless in a work situation. In a time of cuts in education, it is the smaller departments in Arts and Social Science which are threatened with extinction, but Science and Engineering are exhorted by Government to expand and respond to the national crisis in industry.

However, at this point it must be said that, despite the large numbers of women attending adult education, there is a continuing failure to attract working class women. Analysis of the social background of students in 1975 in the Department of Adult Education, Southampton, revealed that 70 per cent came from socio-economic groups A, B and C_1. This continuing trend to attract a predominance of middle class students has exercised the minds of adult educators for decades but discussion of the causes of this situation are limited to factors affecting access to classes - their timing, the cost, provision of creche facilities, whether the publicity materials have been directed to the right places. While all these factors are pertinent and worthy of consideration, it should not be overlooked that the major factor which either attracts or dissuades potential students is the nature of the curriculum - the selection of knowledge which is included, the kind of culture which it reflects, the set of values and beliefs which are implicit in the transmission of knowledge.

University adult education departments are heavily influenced in their curriculum design by the pattern of what it is assumed worthwhile to teach inside universities. As I have already indicated, this selection of knowledge is based on ideological assumptions which subsequently place university graduates in positions of authority and esteem in society generally and which defines the knowledge offered by universities as the most significant and valuable

Given that adult education is influenced and moulded by the dominant culture of universities it is not surprising that those who find themselves excluded from or 'defined out' of that culture are reluctant to participate in extra-mural work which reflects so many of the same characteristics. It will no doubt be argued by adult educators that they do try to respond to current issues and present opportunities for which internal departments cannot cater. Nevertheless the reality is that university adult educators are either full-time university staff or people associated with and influenced by the university, so they do regard themselves as subject specialists. If left to themselves they tend to select knowledge in terms of compartmentalised subjects and present it in a transmittal mode.

The claim to serve the educational needs of all the population cannot be sustained in circumstances in which curriculum selection excludes all but those who can identify with an elitist culture.

A close identification between internal and extra-mural departments in their assumptions about the nature of knowledge flies in the face of Wiltshire's conviction that 'our society and our universities still need an adult education movement which challenges . . . and questions their assumptions'.(13)

If adult education is genuinely to break out of the entrenched pattern of providing yet further opportunities for the already well educated, it needs to adopt a strategy which begins by critically analysing the kind of curriculum which it offers, the characteristics of the different social classes whom it attempts to serve and to identify the discrepancies.

Given that a sexist ideology, which confines women to a narrow range of interests and restricts their achievement, is so pervasive in universities and elsewhere, is it realistic to hope that an alternative model of education for women and, in particular, for working class women, can be adopted in adult education departments? Can adult educators really be expected to pose a challenge to the assumptions of the dominant culture of society as reflected in universities?

At this point it may be helpful to turn to Raymond Williams' views about the dynamic and conflicting nature of cultural hegemony. Both Williams and Gramsci recognise that cultural hegemony is all pervasive but argue that it can never be total and that subordinated groups can still hold a view based on their own experience which is not part of the official ideology. This view allows scope for groups from dominated classes to develop an ideology based on a different set of values and beliefs which can challenge the dominant ideology. Clearly, as Williams says, the degree to which alternative and oppositional forms of culture can emerge must inevitably vary according to circumstances. 'The existence of the possibility of opposition . . . its degree

of openness .... depends on very precise social and political forces'.(14)

In society generally as the decades pass, more and more attention has focussed on the nature of equality and how society must be structurally reorganised if human resources are to be distributed more fairly. The emergence of feminism as an ideology can be seen as an attempt by women to produce a counter hegemony. Groups of women have identified their problems as a social group in the workplace, education and within personal relationships. It has been a main strategy of the feminist movement to discover and publish evidence of women's subordination in society so that the sexist nature of institutional practice can be openly demonstrated. So far the realities of discrimination at the workplace and in education have been partially accepted to the extent that Sex Discrimination legislation has been enacted outlawing the worst abuses.

But what of adult education? Can feminism find a base which can remain sufficiently autonomous from the influence of wider economic and political structures in order that opportunities can be offered which reflect a different social awareness of women's position. Is there a role for conflict, resistance and challenge to sexist ideologies in university adult education?

So far the evidence is that adult education has partially responded to the pressure of feminists by establishing a small number of Women's Studies programmes in many institutions throughout Europe and America. By definition such programmes do not accept the present position of women in society and are involved in heightening female awareness as a necessary prerequisite for social action. By setting up such programmes, women teachers are threatening sexist forms of knowledge in higher education. By offering alternative definitions of women's roles, they are challenging the legitimacy of existing power structures in universities and their right to offer a curriculum which confines and restricts women's aspirations. Not only are they challenging the content of university education but they are also pointing to the fallacy that the knowledge transmitted is somehow an objective truth: by admitting their own subjectivity they call into question the supposed objectivity of male dominated institutions. The effect of this challenge to sexist curricula could be widespread not just within higher education but because of its influence on other sections of education. As Bernstein says 'The major control on the structuring of knowledge at the secondary level is the structuring of knowledge at the tertiary level, specifically the university. Only if there is a major challenge in the structuring of knowledge at this level can there be effective .... change at lower levels'.(15)

If university adult education is to foster an alternative strategy and view of women's role in education, it must take care to avoid two potential pitfalls.

Adult education in terms of its teaching method is more concerned to start with the expressed needs and concerns of students and to provide classes which are relevant to the interests of students. In doing this, tutor-organisers all too frequently offer classes which conform with existing stereotyped ideas about what will interest women. Although based on claims about responding to students' needs, it is very much a provider-dominated process. Rarely does it adopt a positive stance which directly challenges traditional curricula and expectations for women.

The second risk which should be avoided is allied to the relative unimportance with which university adult education is regarded. It is not a coincidence that Women's Studies programmes have been established in extra-mural departments, since their interdisciplinary nature and the unqualified nature of the students makes them suspect in the eyes of those who devote their energies to studying discrete, seemingly autonomous and specialist subject areas. Provided Women's Studies are non-vocational, optional and non-examinable, they remain without status, low in priority and weak in their challenge to established authority and mainstream provision. Only if Women's Studies demand compulsory status are they seen as threatening because then uncommitted students may begin to develop a critical view of the rest of the curriculum in particular, and of academia. (16)

The development of 'Second Chance' programmes for working class women in Southampton, described by Jane Thompson, represents an attempt to widen both the curriculum and the cultural character of the Department's provision, taking account of the different class and culture of working class women. The analysis which gives rise to 'Second Chance' recognises that there is a plurality, complexity and diversity of culture in society which does not find expression in universities or their adult education departments. Hence the social exclusiveness of the student participants.

'Second Chance' is not just about providing opportunities to women but is also an attempt to redress the bias in the content of knowledge. It is not just that women are channelled into certain 'feminine' kinds of subject areas but that, within certain subject areas, they do not appear to feature at all. The study of history, philosophy, religion, art, music and literature is very much a consideration of male achievemebt and activity. The social conditions which produced so much male activity and afforded it so much value and status are left unquestioned. Through this kind of educational process, in traditional extra-mural classes, both men and women subscribe to the belief in female inferiority and male supremacy. Nor is it simply a question of redressing

a bias which has largely left women's exploits out of study. Dorothy Smith has summed it up thus: 'women have largely been excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered. There is a circle effect. Men attend to and treat as significant what men say. The circle of men whose writing and talk was significant to each other extends backwards in time as far as our records reach. What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men. Men listened and listen to what one another said. This is how a tradition is formed'.(17)

This is not to suggest that men have maliciously excluded women from the build-up of knowledge but that they have retained for themselves the power to construct knowledge in the light of their view of the world.

Women's Studies programmes like 'Second Chance' provide a challenge to this condition by encouraging women to regard their own experience as valid and worth expression. Such studies search out the contribution of women and evaluate them against yardsticks which are not necessarily those shared by men. There is a real job of learning to be done here because it means that women cannot accept meanings and values which all men and women have inherited. It means that they must work out their own values which may well be different from the values of men. This is clearly a political process because if it is recognised that the balance of power between the sexes lies with men, and if education is to be associated with increasing genuine equality between the sexes, then education must involve itself in a process through which women can construct their own knowledge and evaluate their own achievements.

It is, of course, very doubtful whether the majority of adult educators in any sector do associate themselves with social change. All of them would subscribe to a process which brings about individual improvement and the broadening of horizons as a means of achieving individual social mobility. But the majority would shudder at engaging in an analysis which advocates programmes designed to counter the alienating features of the dominant culture of society. In so doing they ignore the constraints and obstructions which will effectively preclude for ever participation by all social groups in extra-mural work.

Sexual discrimination and inequality of opportunity for women and girls are the most socially accepted forms of prejudice in modern society. Legislation has distracted attention away from the worst abuses and it takes a very close and careful analysis to reveal just how deeply the subordinate position of women is reflected and reinforced in the organisation of education. A steadily increasing body of research has been published which points to the sexism, sex stereotyping and curricular differentiation between boys and girls in schools.

It might be thought that such patterns would not be found in university adult education but the evidence suggests that, despite their great numbers, adult women are to a slightly lesser extent confined to a narrow range of subject interests and to a lesser range of expectations. Over the decades university adult education has prided itself on providing an educational life-line to those whose circumstances have excluded them from educational opportunities earlier in life. It can still play this role to countless thousands of women if adult educators can recognise the extent to which women are socialised into accepting stereotyped roles which carry an inferior status in society's scale of values. It has been a process which has led to the wholesale waste of educational potential. In a class based society variations occur between classes and the most disadvantaged are women from the working class who have little choice between unskilled or semi-skilled occupations and domestic labour in the home.

Not only must adult educators recognise the sexist ideology which is at work in society and reflected in educational provision but they must commit themselves to change, if they genuinely care about equal opportunities for women and genuinely value women's involvement and contribution to all areas of knowledge. This paper asks that adult educators question the assumptions which are ingrained in the choices they make in designing their programmes. It asks that they inform their practice by analysing the social characteristics of women in different social classes who could benefit most from adult education. Having done so, it asks that they commit themselves ideologically to the cause of genuine equality and translate this into programmes which combine rigorous, relevant study with a genuine interest for exploring the views, values, activities and achievements of women themselves.

This is clearly a political as well as an educational process because it is concerned with the distribution of power between the sexes and between the social classes. But to ignore or shy away from the political is to fall prey to prejudice and bias in favour of the complacent ideology prevalent in male dominated institutions. Changes in policy and practice in university adult education are necessary prerequisites if women are to achieve further opportunity in their struggle for genuine equality.

Pat Usher

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'SECOND CHANCE FOR WOMEN'

Women and Adult Education

It is one of the contradictions of adult education that whilst a significant majority of the students are female, the organisation and provision of classes take very little account of the social, economic and political conditions of being female in our society. The main provision of adult education emanating from the universities and the local authorities operates within the organisational structures and assumptions of a patriarchal society. Only 2 out of the 22 full time tutors in the University of Southampton Department of Adult Education are women. These tutors have responsibility for teaching, planning courses, appointing part time staff and for contributing to the various planning committees and policy-making groups which in turn reflect the organisational structures of the whole department, the faculty and the university. Historically these arrangements have developed in circumstances in which few women have contributed because of restricted job opportunities in these areas and in which masculine ideas about organisation, curriculum, education, achievement and success have become accepted without question.

In LEA circles more of the part-time tutors are women than in Responsible Body provision - probably reflecting the lower status of LEA teaching in the adult education hierarchy. But organising and advisory responsibilities still remain firmly in the hands of men. This becomes even more problematic when you realise that women as students outnumber men by roughly 3 to 1 in LEA provision and that a significant proportion of the courses which they are engaged in are classified as 'womens interests'. It is not just that men have better jobs and are consequently paid more than women in adult education, it is that their definitions of what constitutes relevant and appropriate provision are dominant.

Just as in schooling, women remain disadvantaged so long as definitions about their education are taken in the light of restrictive social definitions about their needs and interests. The pre-occupation, particularly in LEA provision, with classes geared to 'womens interests' like beauty and skincare, dressmaking, cookery and upholstery, for example, are more likely to reinforce women's traditional roles than anticipate their expectations of new or different roles, and however innocuous they may seem, they in fact operate a series of social imperatives based on the acceptance of sexist divisions in society. When the attention of providers is directed at working class women 'in the community', in 'outreach work' or in 'Adult Basic Education' schemes, a

further element becomes seemingly obligatory - child development and parent craft. For those who are 'isolated', 'unable to cope', 'bad managers' or pejoratively described as 'single parents' - relevance and the development of skills is regularly defined in terms of 'being better mothers'. And despite the claims about 'individuality', 'personal development' and 'educational self-fulfilment' so beloved by adult educators, where women are concerned, it is as appendages of homes, husbands and children that they are usually assessed and catered for.

The curriculum of LEA provision compared to university extra mural provision continues the academic distinction made between different types of curriculum for different types of pupils in schools, a demarcation which is also influenced by social class and sex differences. Since the curriculum of university provision is considered to be 'more academic' than LEA provision, its content is assumed to be independent of any sexist bias and consistent with those forms of scholarship and understanding which constitute 'absolute knowledge'. Recent sociological analysis of the creation, selection and control of such knowledge has been a useful reminder of the social as distinct from the neutral nature of its origins and existence, but has obscured the extent to which the social and cultural production of that which counts as academic knowledge also reflects patriarchal definitions as well as class definitions. Again it has been left to feminist academics to 're-discover' and to draw serious attention to the importance of women's history and women's literature and to reveal the underlying assumptions and masculine definitions implicit in the constitution and dissemination of, for example, law, science, medicine and more recently the social sciences.

The extent to which marginality and competition for students has forced university extra mural departments to recognise 'women's interests' in the provision of courses provides an interesting insight into the extent of their thinking about education for women. Just as LEA provision operates on limited definitions of 'women's needs', and a good deal of community and outreach work has been incorporated by the same restricted stereotypes, attempts to accommodate 'content which will specially interest women' in extra mural provision has led to only limited concessions in this respect. The content of the vast majority of courses operateswithout any recognition of sexual bias. In practice they celebrate the cultural, scientific and political achievements of men, they are taught in the main by men but they count - increasingly it seems - on the student patronage of large numbers of middle-class women, for whom university adult education is one of the only ways of retaining a token association with organised learning.

If education for women is to be any different from that which is described here and earlier by Pat Usher, it is not merely a question of changing the content of the curriculum to highlight 'the achievements of women', however refreshing it may be to discover that some women have done more than they're ever given credit for. A simple concentration on the achievements of celebrated women would do little to redress the implicit sexism of the Law, for example, or to alter the ideology which has kept medicine, government and science as masculine preserves. Nor would it have much to say about working class culture.

A more useful activity would be to consider the ways in which this monopoly has been contrived and maintained and to examine the deeper structures of patriarchal authority and its relationship to economic structure, rather than attempt to find <u>different</u> content <u>within</u> the same tradition.(1)

<u>Recruitment</u>

In the summer of 1979 we began publicising 'Second Chance for Women'. At this point our aims were quite simple. We were concerned to redistribute the kind of educational opportunities which well-satisfied adult students, in the most favourable kind of learning environments are entitled to expect, to those who for a variety of social, political and economic reasons had received least from the education system in the past. This meant positive discrimination in favour of women and working-class women in particular. It was to be 'serious education', not the kind of 'low profile' variety which gets smuggled by stealth into community centres, mother and toddlers groups and gatherings of women on housing estates - slipping in between the afternoon 'cuppa' and the organisation of the jumble sale - fearful of being seen to be serious and as a result failing to take seriously the educational needs of the women involved.

The question of 'relevance' was critical from the beginning. As I've suggested earlier, patriarchal ideas about 'social relevance' in adult education are highly dependent upon professional perceptions about womens' domestic homemaking and child-bearing roles. We began with the assumption that the traditional roles of women are discriminatory and restricting ones, so that rather than offering curriculum content designed to reaffirm or reinforce them, we adopted a different definition of social relevance as our starting point. The topics chosen for study were to provide a vehicle for the examination of the shared condition of being female in our society, to examine how sexism and patriarchy operates, what the consequences of this might be for ordinary women and what, if anything, can be done to escape from the limited and limiting expectations which a society like ours still reserves for women. Clearly we were offering an initiation into feminism.

We were also offering an introduction to the study of law, literature, sociology, politics and history, though in a form which is uncommon in university adult education. Annette Kuhn and Anne Marie Wolpe have described the way in which women's studies are by nature inter-disciplinary and how they consequently 'subvert the traditional boundaries between subjects'.(2) As we were soon to discover in practice, because of the ways in which such knowledge has been produced in the past, and given the ways in which it is still most frequently disseminated, our approach soon began to question both its traditional authority and purpose.

The intention of the publicity was to produce a message which was unintimidating and encouraging, which left no one in any doubt about the educational opportunities available and the need for serious commitment but which guaranteed flexibility and plenty of help to those selected. We made it clear that we didn't expect any formal qualifications, that it didn't matter if people felt 'rusty' so far as studying was concerned, and in making the course free, in providing resource packs of reading materials and in providing a creche, we tried to remove, so far as we were able, the financial exclusivity of university adult education. Most important, perhaps, we advertised the course explicitly for working class women.

The response was really quite astonishing given the conventional wisdoms which many adult educators use to explain the 'non-participation' of working class adults in education - lack of confidence, lack of commitment and lack of interest. Over 120 people enquired about the course and more than three times as many people as we had places for actually applied.(3) This kind of response from 'professional feminists' or 'inveterate course goers' would probably be considered unexceptional - though none of the more traditional courses in our extra mural programme seem to attract this amount of attention. How is it to be explained?

Looking back at the application forms again, few of the women who applied identified their expectations in the social class and feminist terms which we used among ourselves to justify our enthusiasms. One of them said, 'I consider myself a feminist but I don't know how to practise it in my life, or how to help organise myself or other women to create more possibilities for women'. Another said, '..... the idea of learning with women about other women is possibly the only way of getting over past difficulties'. The majority talked in terms of their own lack of confidence or lack of purpose. 'There are lots of things I would love to do but as I am no longer sure I am capable of doing them I tend to hesitate and end up not even trying'. 'Since I stopped working I have become less confident'. 'I have had a number of jobs, some like Sales Rep/Merchandiser with an HGV licence - were those in which men would normally

be employed. But in these situations I have always felt inadequate or insecure ... I felt I lacked the intellectual knowledge I seemed to need'. 'Please don't refuse me because I'm 50. I feel that I have another ten years of working life but I don't want to spend it washing other peoples dishes. I'm so tired of being told I'm old and unskilled'. 'My family has grown up and no longer depends on me so much .... now I don't really know what I can do or what I'm capable of'. 'I'm inclined to be self-conscious and feel embarassed easily - I do hope this makes sense to you. I would like to do something worthwhile and feel I can still achieve something in my life' One woman certainly knew what was wrong - not only for her - but for many women like her - but didn't know what to do about it:-

> 'Living on our estate has shown me the feeling of hopelessness that so many working-class women feel. Trapped by bad education, early marriage and children. The situation of women who never get together to talk unless its about kids or 'the prices'. The feeling that to want something else or more is odd. I don't know how relevant this is. If I could write a short piece stating all the reasons why I want to come on the course I wouldn't need the course. I am aware of my ignorance about the topics mentioned but I have an instinctive feeling about the injustice of the educational system that turned me loose on the streets at 15 years old knowing all about 1066 and how to make a Christmas cake with the expectation of working for two or three years. Then marriage. Then kids. That was success. That was what I had been raised for. Well I have found it all a con. game. It's not enough for me I need more but I don't know where to start. Your offer of a Second Chance I think is a place to start. I'm not very good at putting what I feel on paper. I hope you understand the desperation that is behind the words'.

Most of the women who applied were very open about their personal circumstances, their divorces, their children, their frustrations and loneliness but not surprisingly, perhaps, most of them described personal problems with varying degrees of self-blame and failure.

Of course all this would be 'meat and drink' to those imbued with 'the sense of mission' endemic in so much of the work associated with outreach and community education. Adult Basic Education has a whole language of personal deficit and disadvantage and countless assumptions about the fecklessness and failings of individuals who are 'unable to cope' with life as they live it. All kinds of remedial curricula and confidence-inducing treatment, designed to develop 'coping skills' and to provide 'role education' rapidly spring to mind. No doubt readers will be familiar with the local variations of the kinds of education provision I'm referring to.[4] Nell Keddie dismisses them almost without exception as 'bad faith' and as a way in which the 'concept of individual need and student-centredness' based on a pathological model of the individual is used 'to legitimate an ideological commitment by adult education to the status quo'

in which 'the educator's perception of needs ... derives from a concept of disadvantage which seeks to remedy social problems through the imputed inadequacies of individuals'.(5)

Needless to say this was not the way in which we interpreted what we found written on the application forms. Women from an early age are socialised into accepting a position in the social relations of production which isolates and excludes them from much direct participation in the class struggle or in any other form of political action. They derive their status second hand from their fathers and their husbands and once they take on their traditional domestic role in the sexual division of labour, and make their traditional contribution to the reproduction of children within the nuclear family, they become isolated in a very real way from each other.

Although many may be dissatisfied with their domestic isolation and the constraints which keep large numbers of them as unpaid houseworkers and underpaid workers, the careful fostering of 'feminine qualities' in women has effectively helped to discourage them from seeking or attaining power and status in their own right. Since men and women are conventionally defined in relation to each other, and because women occupy relatively disadvantaged positions in relation to male wage earners, they come in time to undervalue themselves. It is not surprising that this often becomes expressed as 'lack of confidence' and for many women takes the form of serious and profound depression. As Hilary Wainwright points out, 'Much of the oppression of women takes place 'in private', in areas of life considered 'personal'. The causes of that oppression are social and economic, but these causes can only be revealed and confronted when women challenge the assumptions of their personal life, of who does the housework, of the way children are brought up, the quality of friendships, even the way we make love and with whom'.(6) These are not normally the subjects of discussion among women, let alone part of the curriculum of education or the basis of political action. The women's movement has helped to bring them to the surface and to make the links between private problems and public conditions. But as yet the women's movement has failed in any significant way to make practical and theoretical contact with working-class women. So far working-class experience has not been central to the recent re-emergence of feminist ideas and for many working-class women the messages of liberation often seem illusory.

In September 1979, as course organiser, I spent three weeks talking individually to almost all of the women who were being considered for the course. I'm aware that the notion of 'formal selection' goes very much against the grain in adult education, although the extent to which the cultural character of mainstream provision effectively screens the active participation of working-class and black students could be seen as a system of covert selection. The

purpose of the interview was to ensure that positive discrimination in favour of working-class women who were keen to learn, and who were anxious to make some use of the learning, was achieved. It would have been very easy to fill the course three times over with women who had already experienced a fair amount of education and who were relatively privileged. The extent to which middle class women identified with the aims of the course and also experienced social isolation and role frustration despite their more comfortable circumstances worried me as a feminist. To exclude anyone because of the middle-class status which they had derived from their husbands seemed wrong. With those who turned out to be inveterate course goers or social dilettantes the decision to exclude them was easier. In the event we recruited 33 students, thirteen more that we had originally planned for. They were, with some exceptions, working-class women. 19 out of the 33 had no formal qualifications, 22 out of the 33 had no previous experience of adult education classes, 12 out of the 33 were single parents, the majority of those who worked were employed part-time in unskilled and low paid jobs and at least a third were dependent on state benefits. We divided the students into two groups - one group meeting on a Tuesday and one group meeting on a Thursday.

Curriculum Matters

Tessa Blackstone argues that whilst higher pay is perhaps the most important way of improving the confidence of women and their image of themselves - 'another is through education. Better educated women are more likely to be politically active, to be employed, to believe in sex equality and to be less likely to avoid situations of conflict'.(7) According to Rosemary Deem women have a choice about such things, 'to stay as they are, or to try to alter their position so that they have greater equality with men. The first choice they possess as individuals, the second they will only achieve collectively'. 'The responsibility of women in education is not only to educate and persuade other women to fight for changes, whether these are legislative, organisational or attitudinal, but also to educate and persuade men that changes are necessary, not just in education but in the whole organisation of society'.(8) We made the decision to begin with women but the wider issues rapidly became apparent.

It seemed important to set an expectation of serious study from the outset, although we took pains to establish a relaxed and informal atmosphere and to do away with the hierarchial and authoritarian relationships which still exist in a good deal of university adult education.

Morning Sessions

The morning sessions were given over to an interdisciplinary study of topics such as the struggle for the vote; the relationship between the family, socialisation and the economic organisation of capitalism; illegitimacy; women in the labour force; the relationship between education, social class and cuts in public spending and the origins, development and decline of the welfare state.

A resource pack of reading materials was produced for each topic and teaching sessions utilised interdisciplinary team-teaching and discussion-centred techniques. The afternoon sessions were rather different and are discussed on page 25.

Because so-called 'academic knowledge' traditionally relies upon strong authority and strict subject boundaries it can become regarded as a form of 'private property' with its own power structure and market value. As Bernstein points out, any disturbances in the classification of knowledge can lead to disturbances in existing authority structures, specific educational identities and concepts of property.(9) Interdisciplinary approaches can threaten the authority of those who have a vested career interest in preserving subject boundaries. And team teaching in which tutors contribute not usually as subject specialists but in relation to each other can be quite challenging to those who have long hidden behind the authority of their specialisms or conducted their business 'in private' with students 'at their feet'.

Happily these concerns did not trouble us too much ideologically, although it took us some time to develop genuine interdisciplinary and team teaching approaches which also recognised and included the existing knowledge and experience of the students. And I think we still have a long way to go before we can claim to have consistently matched practice with philosophy in this respect. The debate with others in our professional reference groups was not so much one of consistency between philosophy and practice, however, but more about the value of the philosophy and the approaches which it encouraged. For those who make a career out of 'being an expert' and hold fairly elitist ideas about quality and excellence it has been usual to dismiss our work as eclectic or superficial. But since the criteria of excellence in practice often rely upon essentially didactic teaching methods, students' inactivity and a preoccupation with 'keeping up the numbers to keep the class alive' - it seems hardly worth arguing about - except in so far as the relegation of our work to the margins of mainstream university adult education makes it vulnerable to investigation and extermination.

What is more important than fruitless debates about 'quality and excellence' is the extent to which an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge questions the

traditional authority and purpose of that knowledge. These issues became clear in the examination of such topics as 'women and crime' and 'women and health' which we introduced in the third term. It rapidly emerged that prevailing definitions about what constitutes 'female behaviour' in these areas are deeply rooted in patriarchal assumptions and controls over the creation, selection and dissemination of legal and medical knowledge.

The purposes of knowledge

Most challenging of all, perhaps, are questions about the purpose of knowledge - both in terms of how established definitions of knowledge have been used to maintain cultural domination and control in class and sexual terms, and also what the purpose of acquiring knowledge might be so far as students are concerned.

For the majority of middle class students in mainstream education 'the purpose of knowledge' rarely presents a problem. For undergraduates it is frequently something which they have to acquire to pass their exminations. Once the examination is passed, the knowledge can be forgotten along with the rest of the things they learned and subsequently forgot at O and A level. Enlightened educators might argue that amassing knowledge is less important then developing skills of logic, discovery and analysis. But whichever variation is preferred the purpose, in vocational terms, is instrumental.

For adult education students knowledge may also be instrumental in the sense of confirming images they have of themselves as consumers of culture, or if they are women, as those responsible for managing and servicing the home. But so far as 'the great tradition' is concerned, knowledge 'for its own sake' is thought to be sufficient. Lawson makes much of 'the essence' of adult education and of its 'traditional role of general cultural diffusion and personal development through studies on a broad perspective'.(10) He is very critical of education which can be described as narrowly instrumental - by which he means the pre-occupation in a good deal of community education with welfare rights, trade union studies and para-political action. Of course for working-class students knowledge and education have to be instrumental. That is not to say that they might not come to enjoy educational activities 'for their own sake', but to make any real sense, education has to be a tool. It might be a way of getting more money or putting yourself in a position to have more choice and better prospects in the job market. Looked at in class terms, its purpose has to be more than a purely individualistic solution to personal disadvantage.

'Really Useful Knowledge'

If the links between personal experience and shared conditions are well made, the purpose of education takes on an added significance. Some understanding of the ways in which class and patriarchal society operates to subordinate some groups, to diminish their status and to restrict their control over the conditions which most significantly affect their lives is the 'first line of defence' against these restrictions. To be able to re-examine personal problems in the social context of sexual inequality and the shared condition of being female in a society like ours opens up the possibility of collective as distinct from purely personal responses. To discover that working class disadvantage is rooted not in failure or inferiority, but in the economic and cultural dominance exercised by those who have historically been able to control and influence economic, social and political institutions, suggests the need for collective as distinct from individual resistance.

In both respects the struggle for social relevance and a curriculum related to social change is not new. Richard Johnson has shown how popular politics from the Corresponding Societies of the 1790s to Chartism and the Owenite Movement all had a lively educational purpose. He characterises the trend in three main ways:

> '1. A running critique of all 'provided' (or 'philanthropic) forms of education including the institutes and the media designed to influence adults. Education (or cultural reproduction) was defined by radicals as a significant area of class struggle.
>
> 2. Alternative sets of educational goals. This included alternative definitions of knowledge and alternative strategies for changing the world, partly by educational means.
>
> 3. A vigorous and varied educational practice. The distinctive feature was an emphasis upon educating women and men as the citizens of a more just social order'.(11)

So far as this tradition was concerned 'really useful knowledge' had to be 'real knowledge' which served practical ends. Johnson records some of its sentiments as outlined in the radical press of the early 19th Century:

> 'This knowledge will be of the best kind because it will be practical'.(12)
>
> 'All useful knowledge consists in the acquirement of ideas concerning our condition in life'.(13)
>
> 'What we want to be informed about is - how to get out of our present troubles'.(14)

'If manure be suffered to lie in idle heaps, it breeds stink and vermin. If properly diffused it vivifies and fertilizes. The same is true of capital and of knowledge. A monopoly of either breeds filth and abomination. A proper diffusion of them fills a country with joy and abundance'.(15)

'When radicals spoke of 'really useful knowledge' they meant most often one, or other, or all of these understandings .... these understandings were powerful. They embraced, after all, a theory of exploitation in the economic realm, a theory of state power and political oppression, a theory of cultural domination ...'(16)

Noah Ablett, a South Wales miner and member of the Ruskin College Marxian Society announced at the Oxford conference of 1907 that both he and the trade unionists he represented were suspicious of the universities 'sudden' concern to 'help the workers to emancipate themselves'.(17)

When the socialist Principal of Ruskin was sacked, some of the more radical students went on strike, and because of their increasing concern that the University Extension Movement was trying to divert and confuse the Labour Movement, they established, as an alternative to Ruskin and the WEA, the Central Labour College in 1909. A relationship of mutual suspicion and frequent hostility continued between the Labour Colleges and the WEA for some years although as Geoff Brown suggests, neither organisation at this time should be seen as necessarily less committed than the other to workers education.(18) What is interesting about their disagreements is that, as in the 19th Century, dissention revolved around what constituted 'really useful knowledge' - its selection, control and dissemination.

A recently re-published edition of 'Life As We Have Known It' records some of the letters and first-hand accounts of the working lives of women who were all members of the Women's Co-operative Guild. The book was first published in 1931 and shows, through detailed accounts of childhood, domestic service, factory work, agricultural labour and family life, how the Guild became an important agent in the education of working class women. Mrs Layton, one of the contributors, makes a distinction between the Guild and Mothers Meetings in which 'ladies came and lectured on the domestic affairs in the workers homes' in a way 'that was impossible for them to understand'. The programme of educational activities devised by the Guilds were more concerned with 'really useful knowledge' - not domestic management as might be expected, but politics, economics and trade unionism.

Women through the Guilds became actively involved in the Co-operative Movement and local politics, they read widely and attended educational and women's rights conferences. The Guild taught them 'what an immense power united action can be, and how the humblest may attain to it in its best form';

it gave them confidence to stand up for themselves, to fight for maternity benefits, divorce, education, insurance and, of course, the vote; it 'brought them out', as they said themselves'.(19)

Fifty years later the same concern to ensure that education provides 'really useful knowledge' which can be linked to social and political action and which gives women the confidence to 'stand up for themselves' has been an important ingredient of 'Second Chance'.

The Afternoon Sessions

The afternoon sessions were originally intended to complement the essentially 'information and analysis-based' approach in the morning sessions, in which the topics of study, though flexible, were planned by the tutors. In the afternoons we decided on a workshop approach in which the content would originate from the students.

During the first half of the course (15 weeks) students were divided into four writers' workshops. The aims of the writers' workshops were not to encourage 'creative writing' as such, or to indulge in 'literary criticism' or to perfect 'grammar and communication skills'. The main concern was to explore the condition of being a woman in our society through discussion and personal writing about first hand experience. The experiences which people chose to write about became the experiences discussed and shared within the groups and included among many others childhood memories, working lives, relationships with men, low income, family life, depression and repression. Julia Kellaway describes the writers' workshops in more detail on p 44. and in particular their contribution to expanding popular culture as a radical alternative to bourgeois definitions of culture and 'proper' cultural expression.

They also provided the setting in which personal experience could be shared with others and in which the links between personal experience and shared conditions could be measured - a process which the women's movement in other circumstances might refer to as 'consciousness raising'. In our groups it certainly enabled women to voice their own feelings about femininity, sexism, childbirth and domestic violence, for example, whilst listening to, and learning from, the experiences of others. The confidence of writing for and discussing with other women in a totally non-competitive way encouraged a good deal of frank discussion about the illusions which many women are expected to subscribe to. A lot of time was spent with social and political questions, whilst at other times explicit and satirical condemnation of mens' attitudes and behaviour towards women enabled us all to laugh at or be angry about and put into some kind of general perspective the day to day difficulties of living in

a society which subordinates women. It would be too much to claim that the support and intimacy between women in these groups enabled them 'at a stroke' to begin to revalue themselves as women and to begin to take stands against subordination in their own lives. Such unity of insight and action is riven through with contradictions among even the most ardent of 'practising feminists'. But certainly for many, the recognition that other women 'felt the same' and were struggling to escape from assorted identities which they did not particularly like was a great mutual strength. Interestingly the language used to express all of this bore very little resemblance to the language of women's liberation and its current jargon, though the underlying sentiments were the same.

After 15 weeks a small publication 'Words in Edgeways' was produced because there was so much good writing coming out of the workshops that we wanted to share it with others. Its freshness and vitality and authenticity are just three more reasons for suggesting that, given the opportunity, many more people have the capacity to be 'creators of art' than are ever allowed to break into print, and that a culture which is largely undervalued or ignored by the education world has strengths and meanings which make a mockery of educational models based on notions of cultural pathology.(20)

The aim in the second half of the year was to extend the workshop idea to include oral history and to explore ways in which masculine and bourgeois control of history can be challenged by the collection of evidence relating to the lived experiences of ordinary people. A fair amount of time was spent in considering the significance of 'a people's history' as distinct from 'historians' history' and in discussing the best ways of recording it.

We took the decision to encourage people to identify their own projects and to choose their own working groups so that after 3 or 4 weeks most students had identified a topic and decided who they were going to work with. It was at this point that our enthusiasm for the idea outstripped our resources and the very real constraints of working in a collective way <u>outside</u> the formal course became obvious. By this time most students were doing a fair amount of homework and reading for the morning sessions. About a third of the group had committed themselves to an extra day a week making radio programmes sponsored by the EOC(21) and of course some of them had part-time jobs, all of them had families and many of them had pre-school age children. The history projects meant yet one more commitment which unlike the preparation for the writers' workshops could not be done individually at home and discussed collectively on course days. By the end of the second term the general view from students was that precious time was being wasted in the afternoon sessions as we tried to keep track of all the different projects. If we had been working in the context of a full-time

course, the pressure of time would not have been such a constraint, but in these circumstances we had to accept that it was, and we agreed to replan the third term in line with what students wanted.(22)

Since 'politics' was by this time becoming a much debated concept and issues were emerging about the 'politics of the course' in relation to 'the politics' of tutors and students, the general feeling was in favour of an examination of the British political system in relation to the philosophy of different parties, pressure groups and organisations, and the strategies available to citizens in a democracy to exercise their political rights.

In many ways these sessions helped to consolidate all that had gone before, in the sense that information learned and experiences shared could now be re-examined in the context of 'organised politics', but not surprisingly perhaps most students had by this time expectations of those who came as local politicians and pressure group campaigners which many of them were unable to live up to. It would seem that not only the parameters of knowledge, the purposes of education and the relationship between tutors and students have to be redefined if courses like Second Chance are to have any real meaning to working class adults, but also that conventional assumptions about 'organised politics' need to be critically re-examined if working class women in particular are to have any confidence in them as relevant forms of action.

Student Reactions

Making generalisations about students' reactions is difficult because I suspect that they have valued the course in different ways to different degrees and for different reasons. But there are one or two observations which seem worth commenting on here.

The first is the high level of commitment and motivation which most students shared. Given that no-one had to come and no-one had to speak a sentence or write a word if she didn't want to - being able to count on people's willingness to become actively involved in the many different activities and issues which emerged proved to be the least of our problems. And this doesn't just mean discussion, reading books and writing - although there was plenty of all of these - it has meant for some, attending a Women's Rights Saturday School in Portsmouth and a Fightback Conference in Southampton,(23) it has meant taking part in the TUC's Day of Action against the cuts, writing a joint submission to the Law Commission about proposed changes in the illegitimacy laws, collecting local evidence about education cuts and writing countless letters to the press, MPs and local councillors about the effects of reducing spending. It has meant producing a small publication 'Words in Edgeways' and a series of six radio

programmes financed by the EOC and given peak air time on local radio. Some individuals have become increasingly involved in neighbourhood politics, one student completed a full scale study of Vietnamese history because she was moved by the Vietnamese refugees she met in connection with the course, another has begun a series of recorded interviews with dockers and their wives from which she wants to produce a small publication 'in memory of her parents'.

Given the variety and enthusiasm of all these developments - the narrow and limited expectations which adult education at all levels so frequently reserves for women seems to have been well challenged. And it is interesting to note the change in emphasis expressed by our students at the end of the course, as a consequence of having done all these things, compared with the reasons they gave for applying in the first place. You will remember how many of them explained weaknesses in a personal way but how we consciously rejected the usual adult education prescriptions intended to 'treat' women 'lacking education' and 'lacking confidence' with none too palatable doses of 'basic education', 'coping skills', 'group therapy' and 'role education'. Presumably 'the cure' measured in these terms would depend upon how much more confident women became in performing basic skills and coping with or adapting to their roles of wives and mothers.

Women on our course certainly spoke about feeling more confident at the end of the year, not because their conventional roles were confirmed, but rather because a resistance to their limitations was encouraged. 'Since I started on the Second Chance for Women course I have become a person rather than being a mother and housewife'. 'The self discipline at first was difficult, adjusting to making time <u>for myself</u>, sometimes I questioned what the hell I was doing, but I'm glad I persevered because now I feel motivated to expand even more, which has given me greater confidence in myself above the usual housewife role'. 'I feel now as if I've rediscovered myself as a person after years of being office dogsbody, girl friend, wife or mother. After 3 years of being at home, a typical bored housewife, I feel that my horizons have opened out beyond my wildest hopes - I feel capable of almost anything - as if my life has been given back to me'. 'I may appear enthusiastic about the course but honestly, I don't know what I'd have done without it - it's made me open my mouth as well as my eyes'. 'I feel more confident about my place in society as a woman. I have learned a lot that has helped me put my point of view across much more effectively. 'Knowledge is power' as they say'. 'I am getting more politically aware now and I will query and question people who make decisions on my behalf whereas before I would have shrugged my shoulders helplessly and walked away. But now I won't'. 'I'm no different to many other women with a home and family

to care for. But there's a part of 'me' that wants to be seen as 'me' 'myself' 'in my own right''. 'This course has helped a lot. It's made me a different person and I feel it's brought qualities out of me I always felt I had but have never been able to show or use because of lack of education. The course has given me a whole new purpose in life and a whole new outlook on things. It's as if I've been given an ever open book. I'm learning from it all the time but finding something new and exciting still left to discover'.

The feeling of acquiring new knowledge has obviously played a big part in all of this. The general reaction after topics in which we discussed, for example, legal changes affecting illegitimacy, the impact of public spending cuts, the weaknesses of the equal opportunities legislation, the treatment of women criminals, the hidden subsidies which support private medicine and private education, etc., etc., was 'if only more people knew about these things'. This was knowledge which raised consciousness about social and political issues, not knowledge to be saved up and stored out of context of real life struggles. Sue Atkins in her paper on p 56 makes a distinction between the consciousness, logistic and skill-related components of knowledge in relation to Law as a subject of study. Clearly all elements are important, but in traditional views of education, the acquisition of knowledge and the intellectual skills defined to manage it are usually given precedence over considerations about the ways in which knowledge originates and is used. So far as our students were concerned knowledge 'for its own sake' was irrelevant compared to 'what you need to know to stop yourself being fooled and manipulated'. But once their expectations of what could be achieved were expanded, the demand for really useful knowledge increased accordingly. 'I no longer accept any viewpoint on any subject without working it out for myself and I have discovered I believe quite different things from the beliefs I've had thrust upon me in the past - mainly by men'.

The link between knowledge and change is difficult to measure in the context of a course like ours and it would be simplistic to try to do so in the context of this very exploratory account. But again some observations are worth recording. At a personal level one woman at least stopped taking vast quantities of pills so that she could concentrate on the course, one or two consciously did away with make-up, long hair and high heels as symbols of the things which men like and which they had previously worn 'to please'. The confidence to be yourself and to dress and look the way you want to is perhaps a small step, but a very significant one, in the personal politics of women's liberation.

Others found friendship and support in the group which went some way to redressing the isolation from each other that many women are made to accept.

Again it's possible to attach too much significance to the long 'phone calls, the shared visits, the exchange of goods and looking after each others children - except to say that we jokingly came to speak of all these things as indicative of 'sisterhood', and perhaps the term acquired a new dimension in the process. Certainly the social nature of the course became increasingly important as it developed, and by this I don't mean social/recreational, I mean shared learning and solidarity with others. Something very different from the individualism encouraged by traditional education. Both Willis[24] and Keddie[25] have argued strongly that the dominant ideology of individualism in education runs contrary to many of the strongest aspects of working class culture. For Keddie 'the issue is not whether individuals have needs or whether they should be met but how those needs are socially and politically constituted and understood, how they are articulated and whose voice is heard. Adult education responds to the collective voice of individualism (understood and contexted only within the cultural bias of individual achievement and middle class lifestyles) but has to a large measure failed to identify with the needs of those who reject the premises on which individualism is based'.

For some students enthusiasm about the course was considerably less than the picture presented so far might suggest. Their reservations and objections provide important considerations which should not be overlooked, although in the context of the course as a whole, they represent a minority view. One student, who could possibly be described as 'aspiring working class' in the classic sense, and married to a very dominant and conservative husband, made much of the question of bias - by which she meant that the views of the tutors were obviously socialist. Our broad commitment to a more egalitarian and just society including the principles of feminism were something none of us wished to deny and most students resented the suggestion that they would be vulnerable to our indoctrination as a consequence of this. One or two who did not think of themselves as working class may have felt some discomfort about the concentration on working class issues, but then others took delight in the term being used with positive as distinct from pejorative connotations. Fears about indoctrination and encouraging 'over-robust attitudes to securing women's rights' were criticisms taken up in anonymous letters from members of the general public and in enquiries from a local councillor and chairman of the educational advisory panel, the area education officer and the chairman of the local ratepayers association. The fact that our students were adults and not children seemed to be ignored by these careful watchdogs and the foolishness which encouraged the local county councillor and chairman of the educational advisory panel to enquire about our 'inciting women to use bad language' seemed to escape none but them. It's easy to dismiss objections like

this, but it's worth remembering that in the battle against marginality, complaints of this nature would not even be investigated normally, nor would allegations of political bias be levelled against any of the countless so-called neutral courses which celebrate the assumptions, achievements and concerns of mainstream culture. Imagine a geography or a literature or an archeology tutor being accused of encouraging 'an over robust enthusiasm' for the subject!

One or two students certainly found the course content threatening - though most of them preferred to make a distinction between challenging and threatening 'I have found many of the ideas and questions challenging to me personally. They totally contradict many of the beliefs I was brought up with and still live with to a certain extent. I don't know how these contradictions will be resolved but I think that it's a good thing to be forced to face the realities .... I haven't found any of it threatening'. 'Yes a challenge to my deadened mind but threatening, no, why should it be?' 'Challenging, yes, threatening, of course not - I have a mind of my own'. 'Yes? I have found the issues raised by the course personally challenging and to some extent threatening. Even communicating with others is a personal challenge after 11 years at home!' 'Life at home with the housework and the children for company, although busy, can dull the senses and becoming aware and getting involved with the issues affecting women today can be quite a shock. A lot of values and attitudes are bound to be challenged when you leave the security of home and begin to look outside again'.

But for those women married to men who are accustomed to expecting little but domesticity from their wives, and women who have developed an emotional and social dependence on their traditional roles, a critical examination of these can also be threatening. Practical feminism, sisterhood and solidarity with working class students has been a central bond which has united most students and tutors but as you might expect - it has offended others. After all, not all students, for reasons we all know about, define their social and economic condition in class and feminist terms. As Martin Yarnit comments in relation to working class students in Liverpool, '(our course) has always had to come to terms with the tension between interests of the politically committed who form a coherent and vocal minority of the students, and the needs of often minimally class conscious students. We have recognised the advantages ... of this mix but we also hold that adult education for the working class has to offer stimulus to both the committed and the uncommitted'.(25)

As in Liverpool, most students have identified with the aims and purpose of our course but it is important that they should all feel at ease in discussing them. Inevitably in a course like Second Chance these issues are controversial, and unlike the 'hidden political curriculum' of most adult education provision, they

are more explicit. We did not lose three students during the year by default but because they knew the implications of what they were learning from us and from each other and it proved objectionable to them.

No one engaged in this kind of work must underestimate the significance of this but should be aware that it is a dilemma which is seldom recognised or faced by those preoccupied with conventional provision.

In the end, as adults, our students will make up their own minds. To assume that they need protection from controversy is patronising and to avoid a free and open debate about social and political concerns is to deny the central importance of these in the organisation of society. Hopefully subsequent groups of students will continue to welcome this opportunity and continue to thrive upon it.

The Process of Praxis

The problem with most post-war liberal adult education which emanates from university extra-mural departments like ours is that, in general, it has concentrated on intellectual needs alone and consistently failed to relate itself to the social and economic conditions which influence and shape the lives of ordinary people. This is one of the main reasons why it has failed to involve working class students in any significant numbers. There are other reasons too[27] but in the end most of them come up against the apparent unwillingness of adult education to look critically at its own practices and to prefer explanations about working class alienation which concentrate on the limitations of working class students who do not 'take advantage of what we have to offer'.

According to Keith Jackson, even liberal progressives have failed 'not because they set themselves a social purpose .... but because they reduced that purpose to a largely educational affair, thus losing most of its meaning in material terms for ordinary men and women'.[28]

For those of us working in the liberal sector of adult education, the urgency is to continually review our educational practice in the light of theory - not a purely educational theory which examines education in isolation from its social context - but a careful examination of the relationship between education and social and political analysis. In this way our practice should be dynamic, continually developed and carefully re-examined.

To attempt this process of praxis and to expand, develop and improve courses like Second Chance is only part of the matter, however. In the last resort the significance of Second Chance and its meaning to working class students - its strengths and weaknesses and struggles - measured only in terms of itself assumes that the issues raised can be confined within the limited boundaries of experimental

work. The issues raised by courses like ours - and I have commented on some of them in this paper - should be faced just as centrally by adult education generally. So long as the process of critical re-examination does not penetrate the rich heartland of liberal provision, we are in danger of assuming that its practices are sacrosanct and that problems only lie in those areas of work like ours which operate on the fringes of the real concerns of adult education.

This continuing distinction between 'experimental work' and 'real work' poses a very real problem for courses like Second Chance which exist at the pleasure of providing institutions, as one of their slightly more interesting but essentially peripheral sidelines. An immediate concern must be whether resources will be maintained to ensure favourable staffing ratios and to keep the courses free. Or whether, after the honeymoon period of experimentation and novelty has passed, attempts will be made to institutionalise the courses in ways which will change the courses but not the institution. And what of the criteria which are used to ensure that funding continues and the courses are taken seriously by those who enable them to happen? If they are to continue to mean anything to the students, they have to reflect different cultural values, attitudes and concerns from those which dominate mainstream provision and yet at some point come to terms with the significance of qualifications to those who do not have them.

If conventional forms of subject-centred and tutor-dominated teaching, which excludes for the most part any serious recognition of the class, cultural and sexual conditions of working class women, are rejected in favour of 'really useful knowledge' linked to personal change and social action, what credence will a narrowly academic and patriarchal institution give to claims for resources?

And what of tutors? The ideology of the women's movement which has helped to inform and sustain the practice of egalitarian teaching methods also subscribes to the view that social movements (and good educational practice) are bigger than individuals. The transience of part-time tutoring helps make a philosophy out of necessity. Next year the courses will have to run with a completely different team of tutors and so far as teaching techniques, inter-disciplinary approaches, the relevance and purpose of knowledge, and consternation caused by controversy are concerned, all these will have to be faced afresh - just as the students will face them too. Perhaps this constitutes the best possible conditions for mutual learning - or perhaps it helps to ensure that the courses will not be expanded, developed or improved beyond their present limitations. Is the price of freedom perpetual marginality in terms of 'the real work' of the department? Or will the impact of Second Chance be allowed, in any significant way, to alter the seemingly unalterable?

In adult education, as in all social institutions which negotiate the struggle between conflicting class and cultural interests, the possibility of change is always present. Policies and programmes are not made in heaven- they are made among men. The time is long overdue for women to enter that debate.

Jane Thompson

References

(1) See the arguments in Feminism and Materialism ed. Anne Marie Wolpe and Annette Kuhn , RKP, 1978.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Recruitment procedures for the 1980-81 courses had to be stopped prematurely when the number of enquiries had passed 305 and the number of applications had reached 156. We have been able to offer places to only 42 students during this academic year.

(4) See Adult Education and the Disadvantaged by Jane Thompson in Adult Education for a Change, op cit.

(5) See Adult Education: An Ideology for Individualism by Nell Keddie in Adult Education for a Change. ibid.

(6) See Beyond the Fragments, Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, Merlin Press, 1978.

(7) The Education of Girls Today, Tessa Blackstone in The Rights and Wrongs of Women ed. Juliet Mitchell and AnnOakley, Penguin, 1976.

(8) Women and Schooling, Rosemary Deem, RKP, 1978.

(9) On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge, Basil Bernstein in Knowledge and Control, ed. Michael F.D. Young, Collier-Macmillan, 1971.

(10) Community Education: a Critical Assessment, K.H. Lawson, Adult Education Vol. 50, no. 1.

(11) Really Useful Knowledge, Radical Education and Working Class Culture, Richard Johnson, in Working Class Culture, ed. Clarke, Critcher and Johnson, Hutchinson, 1979.

(12) The Co-operator (an early Owenite journal)

(13) The Pioneer (an Owenite/Union journal)

(14) The Poor Man's Guardian

(15) The Poor Man's Guardian

(16) Richard Johnson, op. cit.

(17) Independence and Incorporation: the Labour College Movement and the Workers' Educational Association, Geoff Brown in Adult Education for a Change, op cit.

(18) Ibid.

(19) Life As We Have Known It, ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Virago, 1977.

(20) See Writers' Workshops and Working Class Culture, David Evans in Adult Education for a Change, op cit.

(21) The EOC made a grant of £2,000 available between January and August 1980 to enable the origination, production and recording of a series of six radio programmes subsequently broadcast at peak listening time on BBC Radio Solent.

(22) Several students did continue with the projects in their own time, and produced a variety of interesting interviews, reports and recordings.

(23) 'Fightback' is a locally based campaign made up mostly of trade unionists and members of different political parties concerned to oppose government cuts in public spending. After attending an early conference one member of Second Chance was elected to the campaign's organising committee.

(24) Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs, Paul Willis, Saxon House, 1978.

(25) Nell Keddie in Adult Education for a Change, op cit.

(26) Second Chance to Learn, Liverpool: Class and Adult Education, Martin Yarnit in Adult Education for a Change, op cit

(27) See Thompson, Keddie and Westwood in Adult Education for a Change, op cit.

(28) Keith Jackson in his Foreword to Adult Education for a Change, op cit.

PART TIME LEARNING

The most obvious takers of part-time education are women with domestic commitments to husbands or young children or both and it is becoming clear that just as unemployment is affecting more women than men as part-time jobs disappear, so cuts in existing part-time education provision will affect large numbers of women. In the 1979 to 1980 academic session at Southampton University, women constituted 60% of the enrolment in the Adult Education Department compared to something in the region of 35% in the rest of the university. This is a clear indication of the pressures on women to 'opt' for part-time rather than full-time courses. In some subject areas of the Adult Education Department, which of course, only offers part-time courses, the number of women enrolling was as many as 72% of the total.

Many people, including some adult educators, would argue that this is a reasonable dispensation, that adult women are interested in education, if they are interested in it at all, as a hobby or side-line, that it is low on their list of priorities. The argument tends to be circular in that a lecturer or tutor will trivialise the subject taught if his or her expectations are of trivial responses from the students. But whatever people's motivations or interests in joining an adult education class (and I will go on to suggest that women are as interested as men are in education as 'life-fulfilment' or as a means to a job), it remains that higher and further education is an area which is as guilty, perhaps more guilty, as any of failing to make provisions for women.

> 'One of the most serious areas of discrimination against women in Britain is in post-school education. The hard fact is that this country spends much more of its money on the education of men than on the education of women.
>
> This is one of the most basic reasons why women are less well paid than men. One of the obstacles to the improvement of opportunities for women is that so many of the norms in post-school education are based on the needs and problems of men ..... Equality will not be realised until the education system fully recognises that women have babies, look after children and care for old people.'(1)

Earlier this year, the University Grants Committee decided to suspend their financing or subsidising of university creche facilities. Recently,(2) at Glasgow University, a committee set up to investigate equal opportunities within the university was disbanded and the University Court rejected the committee's recommendation that the university creche should be high on its

list of economic priorities. As far as I know, only Leeds University has boycotted the decision to stop spending money on university creche facilities.

Higher and further education, in the norms that it operates and in its failure to provide money for creche facilities, discriminates against large numbers of women students. In an economic recession, this state of affairs is compounded. There is less money for marginal activities within education, women's commitment to formal education is thought to be marginal. Students following 'marginal' courses are not thought worthy of mandatory grants. In an economic recession, discretionary grants are likely to be cut. So it goes on.

The Equal Opportunities Commission has commented on not just the discrimination inherent in the issuing of mandatory and discretionary grants, but on the student grants system as a whole. Married women have to suffer the indignity of having their grant assessed in relation to their husband's income, women whose training is interrupted by the birth of a child often find it difficult, financially, to complete a course.

> 'The E.O.C. has told the Department of Education and Science that the student grants system discriminates against women .... The E.O.C. also stresses the need for a more flexible grants system, which would take into account the need for 'split' education, if women want to resume their courses .... Positive discrimination in some form in the education system is absolutely necessary if girls and women are to regain the ground they have lost, or never had, over the years'.(3)

Second Chance

> 'For me is is very much a full-time occupation, trying to fit my studies and essay writing in with my family role and responsibilities. 'One day' a week sounds fine, but I soon find it becomes a three, sometimes a four day week for me to complete my 'week's work'. I find it very hard, when I have to read a novel, analyse and write an essay on the novel all in one week. Time must be found to watch plays and news items on the television and read items of interest from the daily press.
>
> I often feel I am drowning in deep water. Can I really complete this course?! I sometimes find my day at University very heavy, I go home in a daze, I have a headache, I find it takes me all evening to unwind. When I arrive home, there are children to collect from school, listen to their chatter about their day, encourage them, talk to them. There is also a meal to cook and then finally, wearily put them to bed. No studying to be done that night.
>
> I struggle to find the time to read my books, an hour snatched here an hour snatched there, the days are passing, then I realise there is an essay to write: the very word is foreign to me. It would

help if I knew how to write one. I blunder on, sometimes in panic when I realise the following day my week is up.

I think it would be easier to be single and a full-time student, to have no other life than university life. When you have a family, the pressures and demands upon your time are many. It is very easy to leave housework, to sit and write or read books, but you cannot shut your pre-school child away in a cupboard for the afternoon, to be able to write an essay or read a book. I find myself refusing invitations out during the week. I also feel resentful if anyone calls on me in the evenings or the telephone rings. I have to be careful not to neglect my family. I have to spend the time preparing meals, washing clothes and attending to their needs. They are an important part of my life and at this moment in time, my top priority.

My role as a part-time student, although very important to me, brings for me a lot of pressure, along with the satisfaction of learning and being a student.'

The person who wrote this has been a student for the past fifteen months on the 'Second Chance for Women' course. Ostensibly, she is one of those 60% of women students mentioned earlier who follows a part-time course within the department; one of those women who has a 'hobby' or 'side-line' in addition to running a family.

But what must be clear to anybody is that what this person is writing about is an educational experience of some significance; and I would hazard that this account is quite representative and not at all untypical of the attitudes of many women to education. There were, after all, something like 300 enquiries about the 1980 session of the 'Second Chance' course.

Perhaps we could agree that what this particular person wrote is a testament to her own intensity and involvement in education and a signpost towards what education, at its best, might be. But above all, what she has written is a strong statement about the pressures on women, particularly working-class women with many domestic responsibilities and few financial solutions, to stay out of formal education: and a powerful indictment of the sort of provision (or rather lack of it) made by the education system for adult women.

To emphasise the representative nature of what this person has written, I would like to quote from what other students on the 'Second Chance' courses have written about part-time learning.

One student writes, 'I feel that having a good job that is satisfying and rewarding is about the best thing someone can do': another, 'The road to a better job - I can't be a waitress all my life and wouldn't want to be': another, 'If I had a good job, I doubt whether I would have given education a second thought'. So much for the 'hobby' theory of women's education. These attitudes to jobs were fairly typical and the exceptions who were not interested

in getting a 'good' job in the near future tended to be those who were interested in gaining some entry into full-time education. 'I don't feel that studying is a poor alternative to a good job; there are supposed to be no limits to a person's ability to learn, and I think that trying to widen your knowledge is a worthwhile thing at any age'. Another student writes, 'I would, without any doubt, choose to be a full-time student if it were possible': another, 'If I could become a full-time student I would."

It tended to be husbands, other relations or friends and neighbours who believed in the 'hobby' theory, rather than students themselves. 'I believe my husband thinks it's a nice little hobby': 'My studying is looked upon as a little hobby; alright as long as it doesn't interfere with wash-day and baking-day': and when these friends and relations realise or sense that the 'hobby' theory is no longer applicable, criticism sometimes takes a more overt form. 'I don't always find that family, etc., are really behind me': 'My husband was pleased that I was accepted for the 'Second Chance' course, but then when I discovered the 'woman's role in society', my attitude changed towards everyday things and his attitude changed towards 'Second Chance' ..... He would usually sulk or be very difficult the evening before I was due to attend': 'He pays lip service to it being a good idea, but then complains about the meal, the housework and my 'head in the clouds attitude to life'. He always puts me down, belittling my efforts at writing .....': 'I think my parents and parents-in-law quite liked me in the role of 'the little woman' and they are distinctly unhappy about my idea of going to university full-time'.

The people who wrote these statements universally agreed about the difficulties of sustaining part-time learning, although all had sustained it for at least twelve months. Here are some of their views about financial constraints. 'It would be nice to be a full-time student, but I would have to consider finance prior to what I wanted to do!': 'Grants are not always mandatory, and the male wage-earner's wage is taken into account, which means if the husband of a student earns a good wage, he still ends up subsidising the woman's grant. I don't like the idea of that, as I would personally rather manage to pay on my own, or by the aid of a grant': 'I would love to be a full-time student, even a permanent one, but somehow I don't think I could acquire that many grants ..... Money, or should I say lack of it, and the need for it, is a pain in the ass'. Other people write forcefully about the problems involved in going out to work as well as going out to learn. 'I have an easy week and a hard week. The hard week is when I have worked the previous weekend, I do every other weekend, and as Wednesday (the day of the 'Second Chance' course) is my day off it does mean every other week I have worked a whole week without a

break'. Another person writes, 'My boss thinks I'm mad as he feels women don't need to be that educated, as 'men' are created to 'look after them''. Encountering such problems in other people's attitudes exacerbates the financial and practical difficulties of undertaking 'serious' education.

There was widespread agreement amongst the students that part-time learning, unless through a correspondence course or self-education, would be impossible for women with young children without special provision of creche facilities, of the type provided for the one day a week of 'Second Chance'. 'Without the creche I just would not have been able to commit myself for two years'. Other people express their relief at not having young children to cope with: 'I'm lucky not to have very young children. I don't think they are tolerated at all, unless they are seen but not heard'. 'I don't know how women with more than one child cope': 'To be able to take the kids somewhere where I could study in peace and quiet and they could play under some kind of supervision seems as close ... to me as Utopia'.

Other people write of difficulties of constantly making the adjustment from academic to domestic work: 'It is more difficult to adjust oneself to classwork for one day per week, when the other six days are spent in domesticity': 'And of course, when you get home with your head full of ideas, you open the door to a sink full of washing-up, and your kid nagging you to get his tea, and you realise you've completely forgotten to get any shopping, it's really back to cold reality'.

Another person sums it up: 'I've given up trying to explain to people why I look so bloody tired, why I don't have time to pluck my eyebrows, or waste a morning drinking coffee and gossiping. I think the best sort of learning we could partake of would be 'How to have your cake and eat it' or 'How to become a full and interesting, educated person and not shattered all of the time'. 'This judgement is particularly appropriate in the light of what the Equal Opportunities Commission write about the 'norms in post-school education' being'based on the needs and problems of men'. One of these norms is, surely, that men are entitled to have their cake and eat it. Why not women? The student who made that statement is aware of the problem, but one or two of the women on 'Second Chance' felt that they were 'having their cake and eating it' by being able to stay at home with the children as well as being able to come out to 'Second Chance'; 'I feel lucky in that I get the best of both worlds': 'I think we are very lucky to have this course laid on for us'. They are right in the sense that a large number of other women who applied for 'Second Chance' courses, for whom there was no room last year, will have missed out again on formal education or will have to wait until someone else in Southampton shows some initiative in

setting up courses: but it is a sad comment that women who have been provided by the university with its minimalist provision on minimal resources, on a part-time and piecemeal basis, feel that this is the best in the way of 'luck' that our society can offer them.

Perhaps it is appropriate to finish this section with a general statement written by a 'Second Chance' student, about what formal education can offer women. Like many of the people on the course, this person has nowhere to study - 'I really have nowhere to study at the moment .... I've often had to read in bed until 3 or 4 a.m. to get through a book in time'. (Another student tried taking her young daughter with her to the local library: 'I even tried to sit in my local library and do some reading ... my daughter naturally became bored very quickly ....'). She feels that formal education is a right of people who have few facilities and fewer employment chances:

> 'Many people find staying at home boring and unrewarding especially when their children start school; school hours often don't allow them to take up worthwhile jobs and in these days of unemployment it is extremely hard to find any sort of job. So why not use the available resources to get a better education, especially when our educational system failed so many women the first time round by limiting them to traditional female ambitions?'

Julia Kellaway

References

(1) The statement is made by Eric Robinson, Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission Education Committee: quoted in Second Chance for Adults by Andrew Pates and Martin Good. Papermac, 1979.

(2) Reported in 'Times Higher Education Supplement' 24.10.80.

(3) The Equality Report, Jean Coussins, NCCL.

WORDS IN EDGEWAYS

After the 'Second Chance' courses had begun, we asked people how they had responded to the pre-course advertising which had included reference to 'writers' workshops'. Reactions were as varied as might be imagined from a group of people with diverse interests and experiences. One person had been writing for years and was specifically attracted to the course by the writers' workshop because of the prospect of finding an audience potentially sympathetic to her writing. Another person, highly literate herself, thought and continued to think that the writers' workshop should be an optional element of the course and continued to pose the question throughout the year, 'Why do we need to write?', thereby keeping some of us very much on our toes. Other reactions were expressed in terms of lack of confidence, or initiative or stamina in the face of being asked to write; accompanied by a sense that we were right to ask them to 'do it' because writing is something that educated people ought to be able to do.

All these responses touched on interesting and problematic issues connected with English teaching in Adult Education. Adult students who follow traditional academic courses such as English Literature expect to be asked to give writing, usually other people's, an automatic respect and significance. Underpinning this expectation is an assumption that writing, in our highly literate society, is both a passport to and manifestation of success; that the people who 'do it' are successful and that they have achieved this success by being good at it. Writing is a less sure, but in some ways a more legitimate route to fame and status than money because it is unblemished by philistinism, more indicative in people's minds of talent than luck. All this gives writing a very problematic dimension when it is removed from the arena of competition and individualism and planted in a context of collective or group activity. The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (most of whose writers emerged from workshops established in working-class areas of large towns and cities)[1] offers an alternative to this tradition of 'successful' writing; and it supplied the nearest model to what we wanted to achieve, although part of the paradox was to develop a model which avoided dependence on previous or existing ones.

There were eight or nine people in each of the four writers' workshops which ran throughout the first fifteen weeks of the two 'Second Chance' courses. Two tutors were 'responsible' for the four workshops. The approaches adopted to the four workshops were broadly similar and depended upon establishing

a relationship between discussion and writing which would help people to select from discussion the elements of what they wanted to write. Theoretically, people were under no compulsion to write; we never asked them to write during actual class contact time, but the nature of the activity (or at least, I think it was that rather than coercive attitudes on the part of the tutors) did seem to put most people under a sort of tacit pressure to produce writing. The emphasis within the workshops was on talking, initially on anecdote as a means of sharing experience and eventually on a more analytical means of talking about experience. Writing was another means, less important than talking, of sharing and understanding experience. Initially, there was no thought of writing for a wider readership than ourselves. Publication was not seen as something to which we should aspire, nor as a motivation to write. We did eventually publish (a booklet of writing called 'Words in Edgeways'), the point of publication being an extension of the principle of 'sharing experience'; and the publication was compiled from that already written, not used as a distant carrot to persuade people to write more or better. We did feel that there was a shortage of the sort of printed material that made up 'Words in Edgeways' and that, rather than going into competition in the publishing market, we hoped that we would be filling in a very real gap or 'silence' with writing by and about women, and in particular, working class women.

So, the workshops existed primarily for people to share and understand experience; to discover new ways of saying and exploring what they wanted to say. 'Progress' or development took the form of greater experiment and adventurousness, so that, while early sessions tended to inspire fairly straight-forward, short autobiographical pieces, most people later tried a different or a number of different modes; poems, dialogue, journalism, satire, fiction, playlets; continuing to use their own experience as the basis of the writing, but learning something about the appropriateness of different modes to different experiences. Most people seemed to value 'progress' of this sort. Although there were dissenters who thought our writing would be more likely to improve if we paid more attention to grammar or to modelling our work on 'great writers', the majority view was that to introduce the works of 'great writers' would have been, at best, inhibiting; and might well have led people to believe that one form of writing was more 'professional' or more acceptable than another, inhibiting their tendency to experiment. The other point about not reading 'great writers' in this context, of course, was that it might well have prevented us from developing the primary aim of the workshop (to make sense to each other of our own experience)

as well as throwing the emphasis away from issues and lives on to techniques, skills and the whole ragbag terminology of writing 'style'. Anyway, as well as the occasional pro-grammarian, we had a number of anti-stylists who saw (in my view, with a great deal of perception) linguistic and grammatical rules as middle-class values transformed into, or masquerading as objective patterns of correct language usage. What we did all agree on was that the workshops should be determined by the people within them, and that argument about their determination was also argument about the nature and importance of writing and the nature and importance of women's experience.

The assumptions which did underpin what we were doing, in so far as they were common, were the following. There is a good deal of experience of working class people and, more particularly, of women, which never appears in print, which is held to be of limited, if any, interest, and which remains unexplored. This sort of experience is not inherently boring or prosaic to the people who live it. Strongly-held feelings and keen perceptions about personal experience, whether expressed through autobiography, fiction, dialogue, poetry or talking, are not confined to one social class; there should be scope for conveying these feelings somewhere between the two polarities of self-conscious leisured activity for those with money and literacy aspirations, and fighting for survival and a 'living' in the publishing market (quality of writing 'judged' by financial return).

The majority of people on the 'Second Chance' courses had not written very much, except for letters, since they left school. Part of the 'confidence' problem with writing seemed to arise directly from their experience of formal education. Many people had been at secondary school before the 'creative writing' developments of the '60s and had not written creatively (about personal experience) since primary school or the early years of secondary school. Most of them did not see their own experience as valuable or as interesting to other people. Writing tended to be associated, in most people's minds, not with experience, but with formal constraints imposed by other people. (This may only serve to reflect that women often also see their experience as, not their own, but a set of formal constraints imposed by other people, whether by educators, employers, social service offices, or by husbands and children).

Memories of writing in the past centred upon essays, essay-writing techniques and examinations. Formal education had taught the paradox that essay writing is 'real' writing, that it is the most difficult and rule-bound of forms, but also the most legitimate way of expressing oneself on paper, so that, in people's minds, the 'essay' seemed a sanctified object, probably more

unapproachable than a novel, but, perhaps because of its sanctity, also the form which people want to master; so that the largest barriers to overcome in discovering how to write and enjoy it were those represented by the 'essay' writing as a constraining and frightening experience, divorced from the 'natural' or automatic process of thought and language, bound by 'rights' and wrongs' rules and regulations, legitimate and illegitimate forms of behaviour. These were the sorts of fears that people had learned and remembered from school days, but it was surprising and fortuitous that very few of these preconceptions were transferred to the workshops: perhaps it is no bad thing that people were not encouraged to 'write creatively' at school, or the workshop problems might have been greater! The problem posed by the essay as a form seems representative of problems with English, for adults and in schools: teachers and tutors, many of them, still apply a pre-Leavis model of writing, in which form is separable from content, can be imposed by applying rules, is external rather than inherent, and has nothing to do with the way that people make sense of expereince and language every day in the way that they think and talk.

The writers' workshops, then, were based on discussion of people's experiences: because of the nature of the group, many of these experiences centred upon or became inseparable from issues about women in this society. One thing that emerged was just how much energy and hope we were all investing in the 'Second Chance' course, which for many people had been interpreted, individually, to mean 'last chance'. This investment in the course carried with it a large responsibility for all of us in making the course work. People had invested hope, not as so often happens in formal education, in the qualification that they were likely to get from the course, but in the process and meaning of the course itself. The writers' workshops, taking up complete afternoons of the first fifteen weeks of the course, therefore carried central importance in making the course gell and in allowing people to develop an individual and collective sense of purpose in relation to it. Disappointment was always a possibility; and that some people would get bruised by the experience of the workshops, either because they discovered too much about themselves and were dissatisfied, or because they discovered too much about the rest of society for comfort, also seemed to be inevitable. But the strength of the workshops for most people lay in the discovery that they were not alone. Individually, people discovered that other people shared their thoughts and feelings about women in this society and about men; politically, this gave people a base for conceiving of action, whether through writing, demanding rights, demanding a voice or actually organising. People who had been confined

to the house and family, or to living on the poverty line, or both, discovered that there was a possibility of acting collectively with other people.

One of the biggest worries throughout the course was whether or not these discoveries of political and collective possibilities would sustain themselves once the course finished. Similarly, we worried throughout the workshops about how far we had set up a resonant framework in which people were highly productive only to remove it at the end of fifteen weeks. Courses cannot, of course, last for ever; and our worries were certainly not about the energies of the particular women on the course. But what sort of framework is there in society, particularly for women with young children, to enable people to sustain this sort of energy, action and commitment?

* * * *

The mechanics of the workshops depended on circulating copies of work written by people in the group. The reading of any given piece of writing, sometimes out loud, sometimes to ourselves, depending on inclination and appropriateness, would provoke a response from the rest of the group and discussion would be initiated without artificial 'stimuli'. If no discussion arose (very unusual), we moved on to the next piece of writing. People were very good at accepting writing on its own terms, better, it seemed, than many highly-educated people at responding to what was on the page rather than preconceptions or misconceptions of that. The process of reading and responding nearly always gave rise to further ideas, issues, 'drives' towards further writing; so the process, once initiated, sustained itself. It seems that people did and do learn more about the actual problems involved in writing and the ways of overcoming these problems from this sort of process than they might from 'English Literature' study in the traditional sense of bringing critical judgement to bear on someone else's writing. The motivation for writing arose, not from prepared stimuli or essay titles, but from the process of thinking and talking itself, from a 'continually changing context'.[2] Formal constraints on writing were not applied as 'techniques' to assimilate and impose, but as part of the necessary negotiation involved in writing for a reader or number of readers; that is, as part of the practice of making sense.

One of the problems which emerged early in one of the workshops was raised by someone who felt that the process of writing from and talking about personal experience left no room for the 'private people'. This seemed to me a very real problem if we were concerned to avoid turning the workshops into confessionals or sessions in group psycho-therapy to purge people of repression. After all, the aim was not to diffuse people's tensions (although it was nice

when people 'felt better' as a result of a session!), but to redefine these tensions as 'felt' responses rooted in social and personal histories, not as guilts or psychotic symptoms. My thinking about this, since the issue was raised and discussed, is that there was a confusion going on about whether the 'personal' in personal experience meant private or whether it meant individual. The distinction between these two might not be immediately clear; but what the argument presses towards is a broad definition of personal experience, not to include people's privacy, but to include the books they have read, the films they have seen, the people they have known and the lives they have led and are leading. The person who resisted 'personal writing' did so for very good reasons. She did not want to recall past problems; she did not want to be self-indulgent; she did not want the rest of us to go delving into her psyche to discover the most traumatic moments of adolescence; she did not want to 'complain'. But what we wanted was a notion of the person at the centre of cultural and class values; not the confessional, but a definition of experience which would embrace past cultural and class roots and determine future knowledge. Once this notion is perceived and internalised, there are endless possibilities for writing; to write fiction is to write about experience, to write news is to write about experience, only the strictest form of autobiography is to write about 'private' experience and to run the risk of the confessional (although most writers, of course, are highly selective in writing about their private lives as well).

The distinction here between 'private' and individual is an ideological one and implies another distinction; between a formal education system where there is a received body of knowledge for students to assimilate, in which their personal responses to this knowledge are a relatively unimportant (sometimes wholly unacceptable) quantity; and an 'alternative' set of educational values in which the response of individuals (carrying with it the cultural values of the group to which they belong) is seen as the central consideration; books, films, songs, food, beer, are only important in relation to this response. Books, films, songs, food, beer are part of a coherent, 'felt' response called experience, which should be called knowledge.

This sort of knowledge is associated in most formal education with primary school children. It is associated with intense subjectivity and with people who are more interested in 'heart' than 'brain'. The dominant mythology of formal education is that 'fact' or objective statement is more sophisticated, more intellectually-developed, in other words, a more advanced educational mode than subjectivity or emotional response.[3] Some writers about education have challenged this idea, maintaining that the distinction between 'heart' and 'brain' and between objectivity and subjectivity is a false one; and that, by implication

a lot of bad education results from the attempt to divorce 'fact' from judgement and to perpetuate the divide between emotion and reason. The Bullock Report states that most formal education, and in particular, most writing done in school, is of this factual kind; and

> 'a recent research study on writing in the secondary school revealed that over 80% of the written work in some subjects was judged to have been carried out for test purposes'

If we take 'fact' to mean received opinion, and emotional response to mean personal opinion, then it is easy to see how the formal education system maintains its mystique and authority. In this context, to express a personal response in defiance of received opinion is a political act; if this response is held by others, also in defiance, and is thought to be 'collective', it then becomes subversive. Personal response is allowed to children, not because it is a childish thing, but because children do not tend to organise themselves politically. The Bullock Report acknowledges that the 'best' writing derives from subjectivity or 'specific individual intentions' and that, in writing, 'system and purpose need to go together'; but the argument does not go far enough. People in our writers' workshops wrote, not for therapy or to publish or to retrace their primary school steps into formal writing. They wrote as a political and collective expression of a shared culture, in which individual experience made sense not because of its uniqueness or its originality (middle-class cultural values), but because of the extent to which that experience was shared.

* * * *

During the course, there were two examples of how the versions of 'knowledge' outlined here came into collision. The first was a story told by a history tutor (nothing to do with our 'Second Chance' courses) who specialised in the Second World War. As an example of a difficult session, he told us about a woman who had insisted on 'distracting' him and the rest of the group from the 'real' content of the session by going into long detail about the circumstances in which her husband was killed in the War. The tutor had assumed that this was not 'knowledge', not 'fact' and therefore irrelevant to a session about the War. He assumed that the other adult students in his group felt the same way as he did. To him, the woman posed a pedogogical problem; he wanted to know, basically, what teaching techniques he ought to use to shut her up. The possibility that his knowledge was less significant than hers to him or to the other students in the class had, apparently, not crossed his mind; no subtle doubts about the superiority of 'felt' knowledge or empirical evidence in the face of 'fact' here;

no inner queries about what was interesting and what was boring; no slight hestitations about whether teachers have the right to determine what is acceptable knowledge. And this was a teacher who had no excuses; he did not even have to keep to a syllabus.

The second example is more difficult to dismiss. Towards the end of the writers' workshops, we had a visitor from the University Adult Education Department who had been asked for his assessment of the course. The visitor also happened to be the first man who had set foot in our writers' workshops. Set foot he did, participate he did not. Our first man sat silent from beginning to end of the two hour session; he did not look hostile, he did not look encouraging, he made one or two asides to the 'helpful' person sitting next to him, he certainly made some of us coffee, he looked enigmatic. The rest of us behaved quite uncharacteristically and rather absurdly. We were self-conscious as never before, there was a definite sense of repression evidenced in half-finished statements, sideways glances, sotto voce remarks. We were not fluent. In practice, we read many more pieces of writing than ever before; we commented briefly, barely laughed, and shuffled on to the next peice of paper. Although no-one was positively hostile or withdrawn, the atmosphere was tense and rather nervous.

What was interesting about this occasion was the 'silences' themselves; not because we were inhibited by a man, or by an outsider who just happened to be a man; but because of the pervading consciousness in the group of what he represented and of what effect his presence had. If he had interrupted us, or disagreed, or laughed, we might have been able either to dismiss him or to befriend him; as it was, the presence grew with the silence.

I do not think that it is stretching the point to say that this session represented some of the perennial problems for women and particularly for women acting individually. It seemed that, in the presence of a man, what we had thought of as intensely-felt, shared experience, which was utterly significant, suddenly became a source of tension. Later, we discovered that the visitor had been far from disapproving but we never discovered why he had remained silent, whether through shyness or through deliberate non-intervention, whether he thought his participation would deflect from the process of the session in a way that his simple presence would not, whether he just had nothing to say. What was clear was that, in his presence, our experience, our values, our ideas, suddenly seemed very vulnerable and a bit insignificant.

Perhaps this offers a justification for holding the workshop for women only. The question is a difficult one, but it certainly does not seem enough to emphasise, as the Bullock Report does, only the importance of 'individual' intentions. After that occasion, we were quite convinced of the need for

working-class people and for women in particular to write collectively to stand up against the great weight of middle-class confidence; to preserve something against the 'cultural invasion' by the middle-class.(4)

Publishing Writing

Having argued that our workshops were collective activities, and that we only published our booklet 'Words in Edgeways' out of a desire to share experiences and to fill 'silences', we then had to face some of the consequences and implications of 'going into print'. We were not consciously entering a competitive market with any notion of achieving personal success as writers for the people within the group, or to achieve success as champions of working-class or women's writing. But, to enter the market is a tacit acknowledgement that one is allowing the product to be assessed independently of the context in which it was produced. To publish is to accept that evaluation by other people and in other people's terms is appropriate; and the sort of evaluation which arises most readily is not, 'From what sort of process did this develop?' but, 'Is this good literature?' or 'Is it Art?'. To publish therefore embodied some elements of contradiction for us, our primary interest being in the product, the finished pieces of writing, as an indication of the significance of the process which gave rise to it, not as something which would stand or fall in the 'Great Art' stakes.

It was very obvious when 'Words in Edgeways' was first published that some readers applied judgements to writing that they would not have applied in the workshops themselves; judgement about bad language, censorship and good appearances generally. It was also obvious that as soon as people were responding to pieces of writing as products, they were much less sure of what was going on than when they were responding to individuals talking and writing in a group. Most people in the workshops were fairly phlegmatic about the publication, and not strongly affected, but others were worried about the public relations of publishing, how the booklet would be 'seen', what it would symbolise to others. This view tended to condition responses to pieces of writing in the booklet in a new way. People who held the view seemed much less sure of whether a piece of writing was intended ironically or ambiguously when they looked at the 'product' in the publication, than when they had read the same or similar pieces of writing in the circumstances in which they were produced. Other people were worried by people whom they had not met from the other workshops whose writing appeared beside their own, when the same people would probably not have worried them 'in the flesh'.

A large part of this was almost certainly due to the sheer complexity of the activities of reading and writing; writing is a difficult activity in

which achieving the 'right' amount of nuance is finely-judged, and reading is a difficult activity in which people can misunderstand writing even when, in traditional terms, they are highly literate; but it seems likely that a number of these worries were heightened by seeing writing in isolation from the circumstances in which it was produced, that is as product alone.

Ideally, for our purposes at least, writing should not be seen as a product, as something complete in itself, but as a partial and limited indicator of a more complex process. Perhaps as readers and publishers, we should be flexible enough to appreciate writing in this way, so that when we read 'Words in Edgeways', we should try to evaluate not the writing alone, but 'what was going on'from the moment of germinating a 'writing' idea to the moment of publication. Otherwise people who write and publish may continue to feel, as some of us did, that we had entered a literary competition without really knowing the rules.

People will continue to evaluate writing as product for good or ill, but at least it tends to be recognised among literary critics and publishers that the evaluation of 'working-class writing' is an uneasy practice; that it is not obviously appropriate to sharpen the talons of the familiar bourgeois conventions of literary criticism. The question of how to evaluate working-class writing is inevitably entering into current educational and literary thinking as more of this writing does get published, but the critics are at least tentative in passing judgement.

An article in no. 4 of 'The English Magazine'[5] is an example of some thinking which goes a long way towards avoiding the 'bourgeois' snares, but does not wholly succeed.

The great strength of 'The English Magazine' is that it continuously returns to questions of value, juggling with the basic principles of English and asking those perennial questions which need to be given full airing, like 'Why English Literature?' and 'What is English?'. Given this capacity for tackling important issues, it is not very surprising that they have taken on, in the latest magazine, an evaluation of 'working-class writing'. Gerry Gregory, at Shoreditch College, has compiled a systematic and comprehensive list of a good deal of published material which falls into the category 'working-class'; but it is necessary to take issue with him on some of the criteria employed when he arrives at the thorny problem of evaluating the writing.

Mr Gregory is concerned to avoid the mistake of applying the criteria of 'established 'bourgeois' conventions and literary practices' to working-class writing, and disarms the reader by giving full support to the belief that 'if the vigour, power and sheer quality of working-class vernacular speech is not to be filtered out in the process of getting experience on to paper then

worker writers must 'find' and keep faith with their own 'voices' as well as forge their own new forms'. But immediately afterwards, he follows the too well-trodden path of warning us all against the 'lowering of standards' which might occur if we apply 'special' criteria of judgement to 'working-class writing'. Although he does go on to declare faith in much of the writing, he has at this point revealed an unfortunate hand: the notion that there is a set of 'standards' by which all writing is measurable and which sustains itself on an absolute and unalterable scale of value, is the central ideological point of the 'established 'bourgeois' convention' of literary criticism which Mr Gregory purports to be rejecting. It is this criterion of evaluation that, above all, 'working-class writing' must remain free of if it is to thrive.

Mr Gregory does recover and redeem himself towards the end of his evaluation by stressing the importance of the process of writing as well as the product, the writer's motivations and intentions and the need to share in the experience of 'taking grasp of the apparatus of mass communications', suggesting that he has understood a good deal of the significance of working-class writing. But it is difficult to free him from the accusation that he wants it both ways; to apply this radical critique alongside rather than as an alternative to the criteria of the 'bourgeois convention'. Or perhaps the confusion here simply serves to indicate the strength of the 'bourgeois' grip on all forms of evaluation of writing, and thereby, on all forms of written product.

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(4) See Adult Education and Working Class Culture, Bill Parkinson, Experiments in English Teaching, ed. Craig and Heinemann, Arnold, 1976.

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The study of law, like that of medicine, has tended to be seen by both educationalists and the general public, as the primary concern of those intending to enter the legal profession. The curriculum in most, if not all, law faculties or departments in English universities and polytechnics takes account of the requirements of the professional organizations.(1) Students have traditionally applied to law faculties because they intended to become solicitors or barristers, not because they wished to obtain a degree and were 'good at the subject at school'. Apart from the recently introduced 'O' and 'A' level courses, most law teaching which occurs outside universities, is linked to professional qualifications, be they for lawyers or other professionals such as accountants, surveyors or company secretaries.(2)

Even where courses involving the study of some aspect of law have been offered to adults, they have also tended to be instrumental, to serve a practical purpose. Refresher courses for practitioners, employment of industrial law for trade union officials, social security or family law for community workers are just some examples.

The law teaching on the Second Chance course was not designed as such a tool. To begin with, the students shared no common purpose for studying the law in the way that interest groups such as shop stewards or social workers would have done. Indeed most women, whose conditioning tends to encourage individualized self perceptions, do not immediately see themselves as an interest group within society. By teaching law related to the general social, political and economic condition of women it has been possible, however, to highlight the extent to which women do share difficulties, disadvantages and concerns that stem from their gender and cut across the lines of class, status, life-style and material wealth.

The relevance of including law in this course was most useful in examining patriarchal structures in society and the various ways (of which the law is only one) by which society retains and enforces those structures. The topics and focuses of study were selected to promote certain skills or to serve as examples of specific ideas. In the next section I wish to outline the topics which involved the teaching of law and legal issues and show how this teaching was used to develop skills and ideas.

How Law was used on Second Chance

The topics covered in the morning sessions were divided into four subject areas, Women and the State, Women and Work, Women and the Family, Women and Education. The teaching of law and legal issues was concentrated in the first two subject areas, although we spent two weeks studying the law on illegitimacy and the Law Commission's proposed reforms contained in its Green Paper.(3) Under the broad heading of Women and the State we covered women's struggle for the vote, women and the welfare state and women and crime. Women and Work centred around two case studies, the Trico and Electrolux disputes for equal pay, and necessarily involved studying the content and workings of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. In addition, since one reason often given for denying women equal participation with men in paid employment is that women have babies, we studied the form and limitations of the maternity provisions of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, its then proposed amendments, and the terms of maternity provision in other European countries.

Examination of these topics, in common with others in the morning sessions, were obviously useful in developing or refreshing skills such as serious reading, critical analysis and note-taking. Often the development of these skills was combined with others less obvious. In studying the suffragette and suffragist campaigns for the vote, for example, a comparison was made with public reactions to, and the treatment received by 'contemporary terrorists' - the I.R.A. In content we were questioning not just how history is reported but how law is made, what kind of considerations influence law makers and the relationships between social and policital circumstances, types and tactics and eventual effects. We were also able to introduce in a very dramatic and visual way the law being used against minority groups to enforce their inferior status.(4)

The encouragement of political awareness took another form in studying two equal pay cases. This time the focus of study was not how the law is made, but how it is used, ignored, manipulated and devalued. The Electrolux case was particularly relevant, involving as it did over a hundred women who seemed to have a clear case under the Equal Pay Act 1970, a tribunal case on which the company appealed, the refusal of the trade unions to support the women's claims with collective action, and a formal investigation by the Equal Opportunities Commission. Over four years later the majority of women are still being paid less than men at the Electrolux factory.

The contrast between the effectiveness of collective action by the

women at Trico in achieving equal pay compared with the ineffectiveness of individualized action of the Electrolux workers taking cases to an industrial tribunal under the Equal Pay Act 1970, exposed the weakness inherent in the present legislation. Mr Justice Phillips pointed out in the Employment Appeals tribunal,[5] situations like that at Electrolux, where inequality is the result of widescale complex structural and social factors, cannot be solved by individual complaints, even where the form of the legislation does not of itself limit the use of its provisions.[6]

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 which introduced equality of opportunity for all regardless of sex (and in employment, regardless of marital status) may inadvertently have compounded many women's tendency to personalize their failure to achieve jobs and equal rights with men. The realisation that women's underachievement in most areas of life may be influenced by external factors beyond their immediate control helped to shift the focus of attention from the inadequacy of the 'individual' (perhaps encouraged by individual action under the Act) to an examination of social structure and social control. Insights like this, though not always encouraging, helped clarify the significance of collective action. Also the study of statutes and cases in employment indirectly reinforced the development of an objective assessment of individual experience. Important in this process was the questioning of the authority and power of official bodies, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, not in terms of instinctive distrust (a common reaction to organisations like the D.H.S.S.) but by analysing the constraints created and imposed by such factors as economics, political relations in the widest sense and inbuilt conflicting functions.

Just how far students were able to move from an unquestioning acceptance of the law and official agencies, and how well they understood the reasons underlying the limited effectiveness of either to achieve their popularly perceived ends, was demonstrated in the students' questions to an official from the local job centre. Using their knowledge of anti-discrimination statutes and the concept of indirect discrimination, their questions concerned the pervasive effect of stereotyping and the role that job centres could have in making the law more effective, e.g. by stressing alternative but equally viable qualifications, by arranging interviews for women for traditionally male jobs, and by drawing women's attention to technical TOPS courses, not just the secretarial courses. The unsettling effect on the official of the questions concerning the constraints affecting the job centre officials, their clientele and the range of jobs offered, provoked discussion on how far such employees are aware of, or accept the differences between, what they are supposed to be

achieving and what they do, or indeed can achieve. Interestingly no-one blamed the 'personality' of the employee, something that we might have expected from discussions at the beginning of the course.

I believe that the study of law and legal processes was essential to the development of objectivity in those areas which are most personal - family life and welfare provision. In discussions on the law relating to maternity, illegitimacy, domestic violence, crime and social security benefits, students were able to contribute from their own experiences. By using their contributions instead of reported cases of hypothetical examples, students were able to look at the law in relation to themselves and to develop a new understanding about why things happened to them. Once they could objectively assess their own experience and its relationship to the experiences of others they became less inclined to reject or dissociate themselves from attempts to analyse issues very personal, and often painful to them. The study of law approached in this way was a much more useful tool than for instance a purely sociological study would have been because it aided objectivity whilst retaining individual integrity. Utilizing the students' own experiences in this study additionally invested them with a value. This had two important consequences. Firstly it made other students take notice of what was being said. They could not simply dismiss it as irrelevant to them or 'just another anecdote'. By building on personal experience and relating it to the experience of women generally, some kind of collective identity and sense of shared interests gradually emerged.

Secondly the use of student input challenged traditional concepts of important knowledge. The utilization of students' experience in a subject traditionally regarded as the property of important experts, at one and the same time challenged the usual demarcation between teachers and the taught. It also avoided many of the problems inherent in teaching law to non lawyers and others lacking systematic training in case law and legal method.

To what extent did the teaching of law on the Second Chance course differ from that used on law degree courses?

The teaching of law at undergraduate level can be broken down into three related components, the transmission of knowledge, the acquisition of skills and the formulation of analytical awareness. The first aspect is the most apparent. Lectures concentrate for the most part on what the law is, although an appreciation of exact detail often involves studying how the law has been developed and how it has changed. Areas of law are classified under subject headings, six of which are considered essential to any law course and in which

examination passes gain students exemptions from some of the professional examinations. Students spend hours in the library reading cases, books and articles to discover what the law is in great detail and then spend more hours learning the detail in order to solve problems and pass examinations. Law requires attention to detail. Failure to get the law exactly right may mean you get the wrong answer.

To study law in this way a student must acquire certain skills. Since the majority of students on law degree courses possess at least two 'A' levels of a high grade,[7] there is an assumption that they can read serious literature, assimilate and apply knowledge. Additional skills learnt at degree level may include note taking from lectures or reading, but tend to be specifically concerned with 'handling' the law. Thus students learn to read and analyse reported cases and to identify legal principles. They learn to distinguish cases; to make assessment of which case will be used as the precedent and why; to interpret existing statutes and to predict how new statutes may be interpreted. The degree to which students acquire and learn to utilize these skills governs to some extent their performance in subsequent examinations. Perhaps more important however, it also governs their ability to function as practising lawyers. The law is not static, it changes constantly. It is more important for students to know how to find out the law and to be able to apply analytical skills in changing circumstances than to memorise factual details. In order to advise on what the law is likely to be in an area where there is no established case law, or no case on the exact point, students have to be aware of the influences behind the formation and workings of the law.

The extent to which legal skills and sociology of law are taught explicitly on a law course varies between countries, academic departments, subjects and teachers. Countries, such as America, which have a strong realist tradition tend to include social and political considerations more than countries like England, where the teaching of law in universities is seen as an academic discipline, the practicalities to be left to the professions. Some departments include skills and policy issues in their introductory courses whilst others do not, concentrating more on the development of the legal system. Subjects such as planning law where the law under scrutiny directly governs the relationships between individuals and government and between local and central government lend themselves more easily than others to an explicit investigation of the political nature or role of law. Teachers vary in the interest they have in this aspect of law and in the role it should play in their teaching to undergraduates. So that whereas students expect to be taught what the law is, they may not expect to be taught the skills and analysis connected with it.

Whilst the political role of law, of the legal system and those involved in it, is implicit in many subjects studied in a law degree, it is questionable how many students consciously perceive it without it being drawn to their attention by the teachers. It may seem impossible, for instance, to study criminal law without being aware that here the law is reflecting and enforcing through coercion certain values in society. It is not unusual, however, and few students go on to explore questions such as whose values are being promoted and how these are translated into law. It is unlikely that the criminal law examination will test such awareness. Indeed if the acquisition of legal skills and political analysis is left to chance it is likely that such acquisition will not be tested by examination but by success or lack of it in later life.

The teaching of law on Second Chance differed greatly from that to be found on law degree courses. It was not a law course, not indeed a women's rights course. We did not give detailed exact knowledge of the law, but sufficient detail in carefully selected topics for students to understand the sociology of law surrounding the specific issues studied. Students were not given cases and statutes to read. Indeed the only first hand legal material they read was part of the Law Commission's Green Paper on illegitimacy. At the end of the course students could not have given detailed advice on a problem of law. What they could do was to comment on those areas usually 'left to chance' in traditional teaching. They gained remarkable insight into the social and political character of law and its outstanding contribution to the preservation of patriarchy.

Can the method of teaching law used on the Second Chance course be justified?

Answering this question necessarily involves discussing some other questions. Can study of the nature and role of law be separated from the teaching or learning of detailed knowledge of law and of legal skills? Southampton Law Faculty offers a course called Sociology of Law which deals exclusively with issues such as how law is made and applied, and who or what influences those who make, apply and enforce the law. However this course is offered to second and third year students, students already familiar with the legal system and four areas of substantive law, and who have acquired (however basically) the legal skills outlined in the previous section. On Second Chance we concentrated on the social and political implications of law without concerning ourselves too much with the usual academic prerequisites. The obvious question to ask is whether our approach on Second Chance can work without some basic knowledge of the legal system, legal concepts and the ability to read some legal materials.

To presume that such knowledge may only be assured through teaching is to deny the value of experiential knowledge. Whilst one may have to explain in

detail will and intestate succession to eighteen year olds, it is unlikely that students in adult education will be as ignorant. Similarly adults will be likely to have considerable first hand experience of family life, finance, welfare and employment issues. Their knowledge may be patchy or vary in range or depth, but it is clearly possible to achieve a considerable understanding quite quickly with ad hoc clarification of detail where necessary.

The requirement of ability to read legal materials is not so easily remedied. Although the Green Paper on Illegitimacy dealt fairly clearly with the history of the law on illegitimacy, the ways in which illegitimate children and their parents are discriminated against by law at present, and the options for reform, the accuracy and detail of its content made the document difficult for students to read and to many rendered it almost meaningless. We accept that such accuracy and detail is important. As the Chairman of the Working Party pointed out in his letter to the course,(8) the aim of a working paper is to promote informed discussion(9) on subjects where there is likely to be deep division of public opinion. However there is a great danger that the language and presentation of the issues may preclude general public participation. If ordinary people like those on the Second Chance course are left to study such documents by themselves, then their unfamiliarity with the law and the inaccessibility of legal language may prove an almost insurmountable obstacle. In this instance we were able to go through the document with the students. They were able to ask questions, come to their own conclusions regarding its proposals and ultimately make a joint response to the Law Commission. Rather than deny the value of the law teaching on Second Chance, this exercise seemed to stress its importance. For through it, women, some of whom would be personally affected by changes in the law, were able to participate in the process by which the law may be changed.

Consideration of the Green Paper raises two further issues. Before the topic was introduced on the course none of the students, nor any of the other tutors, had been aware of its existence. The Chairman of the Working Party pointed out that they had issued a press release and held a press conference which resulted in articles in all the national newspapers as well as several radio and television programmes. Since this was a topic on which many students and tutors held strong views or were personally concerned, and many were avid readers of newspapers both tabloid and 'serious', why did they not pick up this information earlier? What image do people have of the law and its relevance to their lives? How is the law portrayed by the media?

It is arguable that the law traditionally taught at undergraduate level and also what is popularly perceived to be 'the law' reflects middle-class interests and concerns. Thus contract, tort, property, revenue and commercial law are

concerned with private property. Company, commercial and revenue law are concerned with business. Even family law which regulates marriage, divorce, relations between parents and children, affecting everyone regardless of economic position, is centred for the purposes of study primarily around property disputes, private maintenance and the family support of children and dependents. If, in addition to the law reflecting class interests, one can link perception of relevance to job aspirations, one may find a reason why until recently so few women have studied law and entered the profession. Although all formal restrictions on women becoming lawyers were lifted in 1919,(10) fifty years later less than seven per cent of barristers and less than four per cent of solicitors were women.(11) So long as women perceive their primary role in life to be a domestic one then they are not likely to feel that the law has any relevance to them. Middle-class girls may no longer translate aspirations of security and respectability into a good marriage and clean living and may, as Hannah Gavron suggests, have a creative and a positive attitude to paid employment, 'something more than a financial aid and a solution to loneliness'.(12) For the working-class girls, for whom society can only offer poorly paid and rather uninteresting employment, the domestic ideal seems to remain as firmly planted as ever.

Of course law does not simply affect one section of society. Property law includes relations between landlord and tenant, both in the private and public sector. In practice family law is concerned as much with social security benefits and public maintenance as with private maintenance and property settlements. Some law degree courses offer a course on the law relating to social security. The law can have relevance even to those groups to whom it may seem to be most remote. Once the students on the Second Chance course were presented with the law in a way and in a context which was useful to them, they studied enthusiastically and asked for more. One student is at present taking a law degree at Southampton University and three others have applied for next year. Their motivations for studying law are not the usual individualistic and careerist ones, traditionally exhibited by middle-class men, and frequently adopted by female applicants. For the students from Second Chance, law has become 'really useful knowledge'(13) to be used as a tool with which to work for better conditions for women. It is hardly surprising that one of these women in addition has begun working at the local social security advice centre and not only gives advice on the law but represents clients' cases at Social Security Appeals Tribunals.

Conclusion

Clearly the role of the media in demystifying the law cannot be underestimated. The response to the publicity on married women's tax position and the

campaign mounted by newspapers and magazines as diverse as the Sunday Times and Woman's Own, demonstrates that women are interested if they are encouraged to feel it applies to them. However it is not sufficient that people are interested and respond when asked. It is also important for people to be able to formulate their own questions. Unless women have an understanding of their position in society they will be unable to make truly informed contributions on matters which concern them, still less challenge the patriarchal structures which affect them. Familiarity with law, legal processes and language is important to the development of such an understanding. The organisation of female lawyers, Rights for Women, through their papers and conferences, are showing that it can be achieved. Indeed their advice centre and recent research activities undertaken by ordinary women confirm our experience that such knowledge stimulates positive action among women to help each other. There is an important role for teachers of law in adult education to give students the knowledge and skills to really understand the law and to utilize that understanding in the ways they choose. In relation to women, the teaching of law may serve a more primary aim of encouraging among women the perception of themselves as an interest group sharing common social and economic conditions and with special interests to defend in society. It may be that for some women such an understanding will encourage the kind of impetus which is necessary to enable them, in co-operation with others to begin challenging the latent assumptions and restrictions imposed upon them both by the law and by other patriarchal systems.

Sue Atkins

References

(1) See A Second Survey of Legal Education in the United Kingdom, J.F. Wilson and S.B. Marsh. Journal of the Society of Public Teachers of Law. Vol. XIII, No. 4, July 1975, particularly pp 27-284.

(2) Ibid p.246.

(3) The Law Commission Working Paper No. 74, Family Law, Illegitimacy, H.M.S.O. 1979.

(4) Use was made of photographs, cartoons, newspapers and posters of the era. Reproductions of suffragette posters and photographs are currently on sale at Museum of London.

(5) Electrolux Ltd. v Hutchinson 1977. Industrial Cases Reports 252. Employment Appeals Tribunal.

(6) Equal Pay cases can only be brought where a man and a woman are engaged in 'like work' under S.1 Equal Pay Act 1970 or where a woman takes a job previously done by a man (or vice versa) under Article 119 Treaty of Rome - see Macarthys Ltd. v Smith (No. 2) 1980. Industrial Relations Law Reports 209. Court of Appeal.

(7) The 'A' level requirements for Universities for 1981/82 seems to be at least two 'B' grades or a 'B' and two 'C's.

(8) Stephen Cretney to Jane Thompson, 17 January 1980.

(9) My emphasis

(10) The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919.

(11) Women and Work - a review, D.E. Manpower Paper No. 11, 1975, Table 5.

(12) The Captive Wife, Hannah Gavron, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, p.113.

(13) See Jane Thompson's comments of page 23.